

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 8, inclusive, answered orally.

Ministerial Responsibilities

9. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the delegation orders he has made in his own Department. [32475/17]

The Taoiseach: On 14 June 2017 the Government appointed Deputy Joe McHugh as Government Chief Whip and Minister of State at my Department and at the Department of Culture, Heritage, and the Gaeltacht with special responsibility for Gaeilge, Gaeltacht and the Islands, and Deputy Paul Kehoe as Minister of State at my Department and at the Department of Defence with special responsibility for Defence.

On 20 June the Government appointed Deputy Pat Breen as Minister of State at my Department and at the Departments of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Social Protection, and Justice and Equality with special responsibility for Trade, Employment, Business, the EU Digital Single Market and Data Protection, Deputy Helen McEntee as Minister of State at my Department and at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade with special responsibility for European Affairs.

At my request, on 5 July, the Government made an Order delegating my statutory functions in relation to the Central Statistics Office under the Statistics Act 1993, the Civil Service Regulation Acts 1956 to 2005 and the Public Service Management (Recruitment and Appointments) Act 2004 to the Government Chief Whip, Deputy McHugh.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

10. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Taoiseach if he has met the religious orders recently. [32476/17]

11. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his meeting with the Roman Catholic Church leaders on 31 August 2017. [39675/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 10 and 11 together.

I have not met with religious orders recently. However, like public representatives generally, I meet with church leaders from all faiths informally from time to time in the course of attending official or public events.

On 31 August last, I held a formal meeting under the structured dialogue process with representatives of the Catholic Church, led by Archbishop Eamon Martin. I was accompanied at the meeting by the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation and by the Ministers for Education and Skills, Health, Transport, Tourism and Sport and Employment Affairs & Social Protection.

A wide ranging discussion took place on a range of important national and international issues and I was very pleased with the engagement that took place and found the exchange to be valuable. Churches and faith communities play an important role in Irish life and I think it is very beneficial that Government should engage with them in a structured way.

This was the first in a series of meetings that I will be holding with dialogue partners.

Questions Nos. 12 to 29, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 30 to 37, inclusive, answered orally.

Carer's Allowance Eligibility

38. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on whether in cases in which one parent is in receipt of carer's allowance for a child and then passes away, the system should allow for an automatic or at least smoother transfer to the surviving parent rather than requiring a new application, which brings additional stresses in addition to financial difficulties at an already very difficult time for the bereaved family; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39444/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am aware of the difficulties experienced by carers and their families especially in sad circumstances such as the loss of a family carer through bereavement. There is already provision within legislation for the continuation of payment of carer's benefit and carer's allowance for a period of six or twelve weeks respectively, following the death of a spouse, civil partner or co-habitant who has been in receipt of these payments in their own right. This provides for a period of financial certainty following bereavement and for a grace period during which a new claim can be made and processed. Carer's benefit and carer's allowance are statutory schemes and if the surviving parent is to provide care, they must, in accordance with legislation, make an individual application for the appropriate payment. In relation to the possible entitlement of the surviving parent, their circumstances need to be examined to ensure that they meet the legislative criteria for either scheme.

This includes an assessment of the insurance record of the surviving parent in the case of carer's benefit and a means assessment in the case of carer's allowance. In circumstances such as those described by the Deputy, sufficient medical evidence regarding the full-time care requirement of the care recipient would already be available, reducing the time taken to process the application.

Carers can continue to work, should their personal circumstances permit, for up to a maximum of 15 hours per week and still be regarded as providing full-time care and attention to a care recipient. This serves to maintain an attachment to the workforce and to ameliorate the risk of social isolation which a carer may experience in their caring role.

Questions Nos. 39 to 43, inclusive, answered orally.

Pensions Reform

44. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to reform the pension system; her further plans to address the anomaly in the calculation of the contributory pension whereby those that took time out of the workforce for caring duties are being denied a full State pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39442/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The State pension contributory is one of a number of pensions the State pays to people over 66. The rate of payment to a person is related to the number of contributions made into the Social Insurance Fund by that person. Entitlement levels are calculated by means of a ‘yearly average’ calculation, where the total contributions paid or credited are divided by the number of years of the working life. Payment rates are banded. For example, someone with a yearly average of 48 contributions will qualify for a full pension, whereas someone with a yearly average of 20 will qualify for a pension at 85% of the full rate. The homemaker’s scheme makes qualification for State pension (contributory) easier for those who take time out of the workforce for caring duties.

The scheme, which was introduced in 1994 and is effective for periods from then, allows gaps of up to 20 years spent caring for children under 12 years of age or incapacitated people to be disregarded when a person’s social insurance record is being averaged for pension purposes.

Where someone does not qualify for a full rate contributory pension, they may qualify for an alternative payment. If their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an Increase for a Qualified Adult amounting to up to 90% of a full rate pension, which by default is paid directly to them. Alternatively, they may qualify for a means-tested State Pension (non-contributory), which amounts to up to 95% of the maximum contributory rate.

It is planned that a total contributions approach will replace the yearly average approach from around 2020, and the position of homemakers will be carefully considered in the context of that reform.

Programme for Government Initiatives

45. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the working family payment that the Government is committed to introducing as outlined in the programme for partnership Government; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39443/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department’s approach to developing the working family payment is being guided by two principles. First, that it should ensure that work pays, and second, and equally important, that it should have a positive effect on reducing child poverty. To advance the commitment contained in the Programme for Partnership Government, my Department established an internal working group and an Inter-Departmental Group of the relevant Government Departments. The purpose of these groups is to consider proposals and to ensure that they are consistent with the two guiding principles of making work pay and tackling child poverty. As part of this process my Department has carried out an extensive analysis of its existing range of supports that are aimed at assisting individuals take up employment. The analysis shows the existing in-work supports are effective, and work well in assisting individuals make the transition from unemployment into employment.

These findings are confirmed by the ESRI's research into the Department's existing in-work measures, and Eurostat figures, which show that the parental in-work poverty rate in Ireland is 5.8%, significantly below the EU 28 average of 11.2%. This is in large part due to the Department's in-work supports such as FIS and the Back to Work Family Dividend.

My Department is working on proposals as to the most appropriate approach to fulfil the requirements of making work pay and tackling child poverty as outlined in the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government, whilst building on the effective measures already in place.

Question No. 46 answered with Question No. 41.

Money Advice and Budgeting Service Reports

47. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on a submission (details supplied) from the MABS national management forum; her plans to deal with this issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39656/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In February 2017, the Board of Citizens Information Board decided to restructure its governance arrangements to a regional model comprising sixteen companies, 8 CIS and 8 MABS companies. The aim of the change is to improve the effectiveness of the control environment, financial management, and governance of CIS and MABS service networks and service delivery standards and consistency. I know that CIB has not taken this operational decision lightly. It follows five years of analysis and consideration of options and extensive consultation with all stakeholders. Since the Board's decision, CIB has held regional consultations with representatives of the CIS and MABS networks. In May, 300 representatives of staff, management, and volunteers, as well as Chairpersons and representatives of local CIS and MABS services attended these sessions. Over the summer, 238 people attended 8 Focus Groups hosted by CIB, at which service delivery strategy, board structures, linkages and staff roles under the new sixteen company model were discussed. I understand the CIB plans to hold a further Focus Group on Volunteers in October. Any suggestions regarding proposals for alternative governance models are a matter for the Board of CIB.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Child Poverty

48. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to tackle child poverty; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39587/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (Better Outcomes Brighter Futures) - BOBF - is the first overarching national policy framework for children and young people (aged 0-24 years), led by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. The purpose of this framework is to coordinate policy across Government to achieve better outcomes for children. Under the BOBF framework, child poverty was identified as a priority.

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in conjunction with partner Departments has produced a paper detailing the Whole of Government approach to Tackling Child Poverty. The paper includes input from relevant Government Departments (Department

for Children and Youth Affairs, Department of Education and Skills, Department of Health and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government) in relation to on-going and planned activities. The structure of the paper is informed by the European Commission's Recommendation on 'Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage', which sets out a robust framework to address child poverty and promote child well-being across three pillars:

- Access to adequate resources;
- Access to affordable quality services; and
- Children's right to participate.

Social transfers play a crucial role in alleviating poverty and inequality and Ireland is among the best in the EU for reducing poverty through social transfers will be considering steps to further improve the poverty-alleviation effect of social transfers in the forthcoming Budget.

However, reducing child poverty is not just about income supports and welfare. Rather, it is also about supporting parents to make the transition into employment. The actions identified in the Action Plan for Jobless Households including the extension of employment supports to qualified adults will also contribute to the reduction of child poverty.

This is why the whole of Government approach emphasises the need for a combined approach to tackling child poverty levels in Ireland, involving both income supports and services.

JobPath Data

49. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons who have been referred to JobPath since its inception; the number of persons that have received a sanction on their welfare payments due to non-engagement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39649/17]

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 commenced operations in mid-2015, and reached full State-wide delivery of the service in July 2016. Almost 120,000 Jobseekers have commenced with the service to date. It is important to note at the outset that the rules and processes for the application of a reduced rate of payment are the same across all of the Department's employment services, whether they are delivered directly by the Department's own Intreo service or through its contracted services.

It should also be noted that only a Departmental official - and not contractor's staff - can make a decision to apply a reduced rate of payment.

The process with regards to such decisions includes written/verbal warnings and an opportunity for the jobseeker to re-engage with the services prior to the application of a reduced payment rate.

Of the 120,000 clients who engaged with the JobPath service, approximately 7000, or 5.8%, have had a penalty rate applied to their payment at some stage. Some of these clients may have had the penalty rate applied after finishing their engagement period with the JobPath service, so the actual number who have had a penalty rate applied while with the JobPath service is likely to be slightly lower.

Public Services Card

50. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the specific legal basis for withholding or denying social welfare payments, including pensions and child benefit, in cases in which a person entitled to such payments fails to register for a public services card; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39595/17]

54. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the social protection payments that require the production of a public services card; the legislation that enables this requirement; the number of payments which have ceased due to non production of the card; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39448/17]

61. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if persons applying for social welfare payments including those applying for the State pension are required to first apply for a public services card; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39585/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 50, 54 and 61 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.

Once a person completes a SAFE 2 registration they may be 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 as to his/her identity when making a new claim.
- Section 247C provides that an existing claimant must satisfy the Minister as to his/her identity and provides for disqualification where an existing claimant fails to do so.

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.

Where a customer is invited to satisfy the Minister as to their identity in the manner prescribed in law, the customer is required to engage with that process. 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.

While the default SAFE 2 registration method is ‘face-to-face’ (as set out at Sections 263B, 241 and 247C (3) of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, as amended), the Department can and does make other arrangements with certain customers, where appropriate, to elevate their identity verification to the SAFE 2 standard. Combining high quality public service identity data with risk analysis and customer consent can, in some circumstances, allow the Department to complete the process by post rather than face-to-face. These alternative methods are 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. 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 is in the process of completing SAFE 2 registration of its entire existing customer base. As the Department is in a roll-out phase and as its customer base is not static, this is an ongoing process. Accordingly, there are people in payment that have not yet been invited to SAFE 2 register and not all first time applicants are yet required to SAFE 2 register before being put in payment. However, over time, as the rollout phase completes, all customers of the Department's schemes will be required to be SAFE 2 registered.

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).

I hope this clarifies the matter for Deputies.

Social Enterprise Sector

51. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her Department has investigated the development of social enterprise projects to create employment opportunities for persons from vulnerable groups (details supplied). [39550/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Community Services Programme (CSP) provides financial support to community companies that provide revenue generating services of a socially inclusive nature. Many of these companies are also funded from other sources and generate revenue from the public use of their facilities and services. In May 2017, my Department announced a call for proposals under strand 3 of CSP, which focuses on social enterprises that employ people who are most distant from the labour market. This includes stabilised and recovering drug misusers and people with convictions who are in contact with probationary services. This call was in response to the additional €1m in funding provided for the programme in budget 2017. Applicants to this call are currently engaged in business planning with Pobal, who operate the scheme on behalf of my Department. It is envisaged that a number of new strand 3 projects will begin to receive CSP funding in 2018 as a result of this year's call for proposals.

In addition to this, the Department of Justice and Equality recently published 'A New Way

Forward' social enterprise strategy 2017-2019. One of the primary objectives of this is to explore the introduction of a specific funding stream for social enterprises that operate alongside the criminal justice sector.

Research and proposals relating to social enterprise and their impact on employment creation among vulnerable groups will also be considered as part of the social enterprise research steering group, which has been established by my colleague, the Minister for Community and Rural Affairs, Minister Michael Ring.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Programme

52. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to review the JobPath programme in view of the ongoing decline in the live register and the level of unemployment declining rapidly below official projections; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39645/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Ireland's Public Employment Service (PES) is managed by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) and delivered directly by its own Intreo service as well as by contracted private companies, such as JobPath, Local Employment Service (LES) and Job Club providers. With JobPath the Department has procured additional resources to enable it to provide a high quality case managed employment support service to people who are long term unemployed and those most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed. The JobPath service was designed to augment and complement the Department's existing employment service capacity, including that provide by LES. The additional capacity provided through the JobPath service has allowed the Department to provide the type and intensity of services required by Jobseekers, particularly those most distant from the labour market.

Prior to the introduction of Intreo and JobPath the Department had a case officer to live register ratio of approximately 1,500:1 compared to international benchmarks of less than 200:1. Today with the reduction in the unemployment rate and the increase in capacity, both internally through Intreo and externally through JobPath, the ratio has reached the upper limit of the international norms and is continuing to trend downwards. JobPath continues to play a key role in the delivery of the services required by Jobseekers and is likely to do so for the next couple of years.

It will take time to accumulate a sufficient number of clients (who have completed their engagement period with the service) for complete and robust outcome data to be available. With this in mind, it is intended that an econometric evaluation of the service will commence at the end of 2017.

The Department has however commenced publishing reports on the performance of the service on a quarterly basis, with the most recent report having been published at the beginning of the month. The report can be accessed on the Department's website.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Programme

53. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection

if she will review the JobPath scheme in view of the numbers that have been sanctioned through the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39687/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the deputy will be aware, the State's Public Employment Service is managed by my Department and delivered directly by its own Intreo service as well as by contracted private companies, such as JobPath, Local Employment Service and Job Club providers. The Department has contracts in place with in excess of 60 companies for the provision of these services. This includes two contracts with JobPath service providers. The JobPath service commenced operations in mid-2015, and reached full State-wide delivery of service in July 2016. Almost 120,000 Jobseekers have commenced with the service to date. Of the 120,000 clients who engaged with the service, approximately 7000, or 5.8%, have had a penalty rate applied to their payment at some stage. It should be noted however that some of these clients may have had a penalty rate applied after finishing their engagement period with the JobPath service, so the actual number who have had a penalty rate applied while with the JobPath service is likely to be slightly lower.

It is important to note that the rules and processes for the application of a reduced rate of payment are the same across all of the Department's employment services whether they are delivered directly by the Department's own Intreo service or through its contracted services.

It should also be noted that only a Departmental official (not contractor's staff) can make such a decision.

The process with regards to such decisions includes written/verbal warnings and an opportunity for the jobseeker to re-engage with the services prior to the application of a reduced payment rate.

Question No. 54 answered with Question No. 50.

State Pension (Contributory) Data

55. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in County Wexford who do not receive a full contributory pension payment due to 2012 band changes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39651/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The State pension contributory is one of a number of pensions the State pays to people over 66. The rate of payment to a person is related to the number of contributions made over the years into the Social Insurance Fund by the person. Entitlement levels are calculated by means of a 'yearly average' calculation, where the total contributions paid or credited are divided by the number of years of the working life. Payment rates are banded. For example, someone with a yearly average of 48 contributions will qualify for a full pension, whereas someone with a yearly average of 20 will qualify for a pension at 85% of the full rate. As provided for in Budget 2012, from September 2012, the current rate bands for State pension (contributory) claims were introduced. These did not change the rate of payment for those who would have qualified for a maximum rate pension under the old rate bands, nor those with a yearly average of 40-47 who continue to qualify at the 98% rate of payment.

Those affected, therefore, are all pensioners with a yearly average of less than 40 contributions. In response to the Deputy's direct question, none of these would have qualified for a full contributory pension had they retired under the old rate bands.

I am informed that some 557 pensioners currently resident in Wexford are paid under the

new rate-bands at a somewhat lower percentage rate than applied under claims made in 2000-2012. It is important to note that these pensioners would not have qualified for a full rate pension under the previous rate bands either.

The current rate bands replaced previous rates introduced in 2000 and more accurately reflect the social insurance contributions history of a person. Where people who were unattached to the labour market during most of their adult lives cannot qualify for a contributory pension in their own right as they have paid few or no contributions, or cannot qualify for a full rate as a result of an intermittent PRSI record, the social protection system provides alternative methods of supporting such pensioners in old age. If their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an Increase for a Qualified Adult amounting up to 90% of a full rate pension, which by default is paid directly to them. Alternatively, they may qualify for a means-tested State Pension (non-contributory), amounting up to 95% of the maximum contributory pension rate.

There are very significant income and capital disregards in respect of both of those payments, and the large majority of recipients of the non-contributory pension and the IQA payment on a contributory pension are paid at the maximum rate. Those who are alternatively paid lower amounts under the State pension (contributory), therefore, will generally be people with access to significant means (e.g. private pensions), for whom that payment remains more advantageous, and maximises their total income.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Job Creation

56. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which she plans to address the unemployment blackspots in County Limerick as outlined by the recent CSO census data (details supplied). [30622/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is the official source of employment and unemployment statistics for the State. Reflecting the impact of Government policy, and the overall improvement in the labour market, the unemployment rate has fallen rapidly since it peaked at 15.1% in Q1 2012. The most recent figure is 6.8% in Q1 2017, and unemployment has fallen by more than half in every region of the country over this period. A strong downward trend continues. In Q2 2016, the unemployment rate as measured by the QNHS was 8.6%. The Census of Population 2016 Summary Results - Part 2, published on 15 June 2017 (based on Census night 24th April 2016) provided an alternative measure of unemployment levels and indicated an unemployment rate of 12.7%. The main difference in the unemployment rate between the two sources arises as the classifications used in the measurement of unemployment differ for both.

In the QNHS, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) classification is used and defines employment, unemployment and the inactive population. Unemployment is defined as persons who, in the week before the survey, were without work and available for work within the next two weeks, and had taken specific steps, in the preceding four weeks, to find work.

The Census uses the Principal Economic Status (PES) classification to establish the labour force situation of the respondent. The PES classification is based on how respondents would describe their present principal status including a status of being unemployed.

Notwithstanding these differences, a strength of the census-based data on employment and unemployment is the provision of data for small geographic areas, and analysis on the comparisons between areas. Based on this, the latest census report has identified the 79 District Elector-

al Divisions (DEDs) with the highest levels of unemployment as “unemployment blackspots”. The DEDs involved vary greatly in population size (ranging from about 490 to about 8,400) and other characteristics. They are, however, predominantly the DEDs of highest unemployment within larger urban areas; over half of the blackspots, and over half of the population resident in blackspots, is in the cities of Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Waterford.

Government policy to reduce unemployment is twofold. First, through policies set out in the Action Plan for Jobs, to create an environment in which business can succeed and create jobs; and second, through Pathways to Work to ensure that as many of these new jobs and other vacancies that arise in our economy are filled by people taken from the Live Register.

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

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

The Pathways to Work 2016-2020 strategy continues to prioritise actions for the newly unemployed and also includes a range of measures for the long-term unemployed. This includes the payment-by-results services of JobPath to engage more systematically with the long-term unemployed; providing targeted wage subsidies under JobsPlus; and reserved places for long-term unemployed jobseekers on employment and training programmes.

In relation to ‘blackspots’ with a high concentration of unemployment, it is important to recognise that DEASP services through Intreo are focused on unemployed individuals rather than on areas.

This means, nonetheless, that those areas where unemployed individuals are most concentrated will also be the areas that receive a greater share of DEASP income support payments and activation and employment services.

Finally, the Census shows that the concentration of unemployment in ‘blackspots’ is related to issues such as low educational attainment; housing tenure; and other markers of disadvantage. Where there is a high spatial concentration of blackspots, such as in Limerick, there are overarching strategies in place. For example, the Limerick Regeneration Plan includes a range of measures to address the multitude of issues present in these areas. More generally, measures are in place across a range of policy fields, such as education and childcare, to focus enhanced support on areas of identified disadvantage.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

57. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the actions being taken by her Department to tackle long waiting times for the processing of

domiciliary care allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39583/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department is currently experiencing delays in the processing of Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) claims. We are extremely sorry for any worry or concern this may cause to parents/guardians of children with additional care needs. At present, it is taking 17 weeks on average to finalise an application. While this represents an improvement of some 3 weeks compared to the time taken in July and August, it is hoped that corrective actions in place will further reduce processing times over coming weeks. Applications are processed in date of receipt order allowing for the complexity of individual cases. A number of factors have contributed to the extended timeframe required to process claims at this time.

First, there is a significant increase in the volume of applications being received. The numbers applying for DCA have increased significantly since 2009, when the Department took over administration of the scheme from the HSE. The year on year increase in volumes over recent years has consistently been in the 15 to 20% range, due to an increase in population and more awareness of the scheme. Currently over 625 applications are received each month, whereas the average would have been 400 per month a few years ago.

Secondly, following a High Court ruling in 2016, there is now a need for the Department's medical assessors to provide the deciding officer with a more detailed opinion on the child's eligibility for the scheme and for the deciding officer in turn to provide more detailed reasons for their decision when communicating this to the customer. These factors have resulted in the time taken to finalise applications increasing significantly. As a result the numbers being processed have reduced and the timescale to finalise each application has increased.

Corrective actions are being taken, with significant new additional staff resources allocated to decision making since July. As these staff are now fully up to speed on decision making, it is anticipated that the improvement in the processing time currently being experienced will continue and it is hoped to reduce delays further over the coming weeks and months.

Applications once decided are back dated to the date of application and any arrears due are paid as soon as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory)

58. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to address anomalies in the State pension which are leading to reduced State pension payments for those without the necessary PRSI contributions, namely the averaging calculation in place; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39584/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The State pension contributory is one of a number of pensions the State pays to people over 66. The rate of payment to a person is related to the number of contributions made over the years into the Social Insurance Fund by the person. Entitlement levels are calculated by means of a 'yearly average' calculation, where the total contributions paid or credited are divided by the number of years of the working life. Payment rates are banded. For example, someone with a yearly average of 48 contributions will qualify for a full pension, whereas someone with a yearly average of 20 will qualify for a pension at 85% of the full rate. The homemaker's scheme was introduced in 1994 to make qualification easier for those who took time out of the workforce for caring duties. It allows up to 20 such years, in the period since its introduction, to be disre-

garded when their record is being averaged for pension purposes.

Where someone does not qualify for a full rate contributory pension, they may qualify for an alternative payment. If their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an Increase for a Qualified Adult amounting up to 90% of a full rate pension, which by default is paid directly to them. Alternatively, they may qualify for a means-tested State Pension (non-contributory), which amounts up to 95% of the maximum contributory rate.

Work is under way to replace the yearly average system with a Total Contributions Approach (TCA). Under this approach, the rate of pension paid will more closely reflect the total number of contributions made by people, not when they paid them. The position of homemakers is being carefully considered in developing this new system of calculating the State Pension (contributory).

It is hoped that this approach to pension qualification will replace the current one from 2020. Following completion of the actuarial review of the Social Insurance Fund this year, a refined proposal will be developed. My Department will conduct a period of consultation with relevant stakeholders, including interest groups, representative bodies and the Oireachtas. Following the consultation period, I will submit a proposal to Government seeking approval for the new approach, and then proceed to introduce legislation to give effect to this reform.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pensions Reform

59. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the timeframe for publishing an action plan on pension reform; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39644/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I have previously highlighted that pensions reform will be a priority of my Department and can confirm my intention to publish and commence the implementation of a pensions reform plan before the end of this year. Two of the most significant measures in the plan will be a road map for the reform of the State pension through the introduction of a “Total Contributions Approach” (TCA) for new pensioners, and the development of a new auto enrolment supplementary retirement savings system for employees without pensions coverage. The plan will also include measures to reform and simplify the current supplementary pension landscape and measures required to transpose the EU ‘IORP’ Pensions Directive. The objective of these reforms will be to establish a sound and fit for purpose pension system for the coming decades, one that will shape the retirement landscape benefitting our retirees for generations to come. In developing key proposals, my Department will conduct a period of consultation with relevant stakeholders including interest groups, representative bodies and the Oireachtas.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Public Services Card Data

60. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she is satisfied that the introduction of the public services card will adhere to the highest standard of data protection; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39618/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):

Section 263 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (as amended) provides for the data items that can be inscribed on the face or encoded on the chip of the Public Services Card. That data is part of the Public Service Identity (PSI) dataset as set out in section 262 of the Act. The PSI data set is stored in enterprise class databases maintained in my Department's secure data-centres. My Department is committed to ensuring that customers' personal data is securely held and used only for business purposes. Accordingly, 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. My 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 Information Systems 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 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 the Deputy.

Question No. 61 answered with Question No. 50.

Rent Supplement Scheme Administration

62. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will disregard means testing of maintenance payments with rent allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39684/17]

64. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which her attention has been drawn to of the serious dependency on rent support from her Department for persons on lower incomes from employment or social welfare,

with particular reference to the need to ensure that the issues of homelessness are not exacerbated by reference to use of legislation or guidelines more applicable to a time when housing was not an issue; if she will pay particular attention to reduction or cessation of rent support which may have resulted in homelessness in the course of the past year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39647/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 62 and 64 together.

Rent supplement plays a vital role in housing families and individuals, with the scheme currently supporting 38,600 recipients at a cost of €253 million in 2017.

I can assure the deputies every effort is made by my Department so that rent supplement tenants can remain in their homes. In view of the on-going rental market difficulties, my Department implements a targeted case-by-case policy approach that allows for flexibility where landlords seek rents in excess of the rent limits.

In addition, the Protocol arrangement in place with Threshold is operational in the areas where supply issues are particularly acute covering Kildare, Dublin, Cork, Meath, Wicklow and Galway City. To date in 2017, in excess of 1,370 recipients have been supported with increased rent payments.

Continued entitlement to rent supplement may be reviewed following a decision to suspend or disallow a primary social welfare payment as there may be a change to the claimant's circumstances that could affect eligibility. Any person in this situation is encouraged to contact the Department's office responsible for their rent supplement claim to discuss their situation, if there is a specific risk of homelessness this should be communicated at the earliest opportunity so that continued eligibility can be determined without delay.

Rent supplement is a statutory means tested scheme, payable at differentiated rates of payment according to the applicant's means and accommodation requirements, and is normally calculated to ensure that a person, after the payment of rent, has an income equal to the rate of supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) appropriate to their family circumstances, less a weekly minimum contribution which recipients are required to pay from their own resources. For rent supplement, maintenance payments of up to €95.23 per week are assessable on the basis that vouched accommodation costs of up to this amount are disregarded in the assessment of weekly social assistance payments such as jobseeker's allowance and one-parent family payment.

Any changes to the rent supplement scheme can only be considered in a budgetary context and within the scope of the overall resources available for welfare improvements.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputies.

Public Services Card

63. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a cost benefit analysis was carried out by her Department regarding the public services card; if so, the date on which this will be published; the amount her Department has saved by preventing social welfare fraud through the roll-out of the public services card; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39596/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):

Given the innovative nature of the project and the fact that there weren't any ready references for comparison purposes in the early 2000s, it was not possible in the early stages of the project to determine precise costs and staffing requirements, and thereby develop a full cost benefit analysis. 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 from 2005 to 2007 involved the research and design of a card, the development of the detailed functional specification required for the Public Services Card (PSC), and a project proposal for the development and deployment of the PSC and associated infrastructure. In 2007, the second phase, to procure a managed services contract for the production of the card, began and was completed in 2009. This 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 in 2011, 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. The fourth phase was implementation which began gradually as resources became available and registration infrastructure was deployed.

There are significant benefits to the individual and public bodies in this project. The idea behind the PSC and its underlying identity verification process is to provide public bodies with significant assurance as to the identity of individuals they are providing services to and to provide individuals with greater assurance that their identity can't be used by anybody else in dealings with public bodies. Therefore, with the PSC –

- Identity verification to a substantial level of assurance is now completed on a “once and done” basis – by one public body – and all others do not have to develop and implement identity registration processes and technologies.

- It reduces the number of people who can fraudulently claim to be someone else.

- It is a secure card and considerably reduces the potential for forgery.

- It acts as a major deterrent to perpetrate fraud.

- It allows public bodies to offer high value and personalised services online using MyGovID – an online identity verification solution.

- It reduces or will eliminate the need for multiple cards, e.g., where people previously had a social services card, a free travel pass, and may have had to provide photo ID in the collection of payments or accessing public transport, they now need just a PSC.

Since the introduction of the PSC, my Department has detected 146 cases of suspected identity fraud have been referred to the Department's Special Investigation Unit (SIU). Of these, 64 cases have been concluded with 21 finalised in Court (where 18 of them received a custodial sentence), 15 not proceeded with (mainly due to the person leaving the jurisdiction), and 28 with formal proceedings issued and awaiting court appearance. Fraud overpayments of €3 Million have been assessed in these 64 cases. The other 82 cases are under investigation or at various stages of the prosecution process. Assessments will be determined for these (and any others that materialise in the future) as they are brought to conclusion.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 64 answered with Question No. 62.

Social Welfare Benefits

65. **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; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39427/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): There are no plans to establish a “cost of disability” payment within 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 Executive and also the Revenue Commissioners through certain tax reliefs and other supports. The further introduction of a “cost of disability” payment would therefore 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. One indication of the scale of potential additional programme spend would be to estimate the additional annual cost of increasing the main social protection schemes that are targeted at long-term illness and disability conditions.

It is estimated that the annual cost of increasing invalidity pension, disability allowance and domiciliary care allowance by the equivalent of €20 per week would be of the order of €240 million. 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. Increases to other payments including pensions may also have to be considered in such a scenario where recipients are likely to experience limiting conditions because of their disability.

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.

Public Services Card

66. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on making the public services card compulsory for availing of public services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39686/17]

73. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on making the public services card compulsory for availing of public services; her further views on maintaining the option to use other forms of identification such as driver licences and passports which are at a safe 2 level to prove identity for accessing services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39650/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 66 and 73 together.

A Public Services Card may be issued to an individual who has successfully authenticated their identity to SAFE Level 2, i.e., to a substantial level of assurance. I have been 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 those 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."

The SAFE 2 registration process involves a face-to-face interaction; the verification and capture of the Public Service Identity (PSI) data set, the examination/validation/verification of at least two documents supporting identity, and photo-matching.

Taken individually, neither a passport, nor a driver's license, nor a birth certificate is enough to validate an identity to SAFE Level 2. However, in combination and with the other data and processes mentioned above, they can be used to verify an identity to SAFE2 level. Until very recently the application process for an Irish passport or a Driver Theory Test did not comply with the SAFE 2 standard of identity verification. Since March 2016, SAFE 2 registration became a requirement for first time adult passport applicants in the State; it was introduced as a requirement for applicants for citizenship in September 2016; and introduced as a requirement for Driver Theory test applicants in June 2017.

In practical terms, and to ensure that there isn't duplication of process, this has meant that the bodies in charge of these services have decided that they would utilise the SAFE 2 registration infrastructure that my Department has developed.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputies.

Community Employment Schemes Administration

67. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will allow persons seeking employment who have been awarded a place on a community scheme or Tús but not yet started, and who are pulled for JobPath before training starts, to be allowed to choose between the community employment scheme or Tús; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39681/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department provides a range of activation supports for long-term unemployed jobseekers and those most distant from the labour market. These supports include JobPath and employment programmes such as Community Employment (CE) schemes and Tús. Both CE and Tús provide part-time temporary work in local communities, as a stepping-stone back to employment, for people in receipt of certain social welfare payments including those on a long-term jobseeker's payment. The JobPath service provides intensive individual support to people who are long-term unemployed and those most distant from the labour market to secure and sustain full-time paid employment. This service is provided solely for jobseekers. The period of engagement with JobPath for any individual is typically 52 weeks. During that time, they receive

intensive individual support to help them overcome barriers to employment and are also provided with a range of training and development supports, including online modules, career advice, CV preparation and interview skills. Where a jobseeker, has a written offer of a placement on CE or TÚS and a commencement date within 4 weeks of the date of referral to JobPath, they will be facilitated to take up the place – where Garda vetting is required for the placement, the time period will be extended to allow for that process to be completed. In addition people who have completed their year-long engagement with JobPath may, if eligible, apply to partake in a CE or Tús scheme provided they have been assessed by one of my Department's case officers.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

Homemakers Scheme

68. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will extend the homemakers scheme of contributory pensioners pre-1994 by reversing budget 2012; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39682/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Entitlement levels to the State Pension (contributory) are calculated by means of a 'yearly average' calculation, where the total contributions paid or credited are divided by the number of years of the working life. Payment rates are banded. For example, someone with a yearly average of 48 contributions will qualify for a full pension, whereas someone with a yearly average of 20 will qualify for a pension at 85% of the full rate. The homemaker's scheme was introduced in 1994 to make qualification easier for those who took time out of the workforce for caring duties. It allows up to 20 such years, in the period since its introduction, to be disregarded when their record is being averaged for pension purposes. It is estimated that extending this scheme to include periods prior to its introduction in 1994 would cost some €290 million per annum. The current rate bands applying to the State pension (contributory) were introduced from September 2012, replacing previous rates introduced in 2000. These more accurately reflect the social insurance contributions history of a person.

Alternative payments are available for those with small additional means. It is estimated that to revert to the previous bands would cost at least €60 million in 2018, and this annual cost would increase at an estimated €10 million each year. The main beneficiaries from such a decision would be better off pensioners who do not qualify for means-tested pension payments, and who did not make sufficient contributions into the Social Insurance Fund to qualify for a full rate contributory pension.

Any change of this nature would have to be considered in the context of the Budgetary process, the available resources, and the competing demands for funds in my Department.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Child Poverty

69. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the steps she will take to meet targets on reducing child poverty; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39642/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (Better Outcomes, Brighter Fu-

tures), published by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in 2014, includes a target to reduce by two-thirds, the number of children in consistent poverty in 2011 by 2020. Meeting this target means lifting 102,000 children out of poverty. Under this Framework, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in collaboration with my Department and other relevant Departments is taking a whole-of-government approach to tackling child poverty. 2015 saw the first reduction in the number of children in consistent poverty since 2008 when there was a reduction of 13,000 or approximately 9 per cent decrease in the number of children in consistent poverty. The full impact of the recovery is not yet reflected in these figures. As unemployment is strongly linked to poverty, we can expect further decreases in poverty as the figures for 2016 and 2017 become available. The Government continues to focus on helping people back into the workforce. However, it is clear that the target to reduce child poverty by more than 100,000 children, or two thirds of the 2011 rate, is ambitious and may not be met. My Department helps to prevent child poverty by providing income support for families through child benefit, qualified child increases for welfare recipients, family income supplement and the back to school clothing and footwear allowance, amounting to more than €3 billion this year.

Social transfers play a crucial role in alleviating poverty and inequality and Ireland is among the best in the EU for reducing poverty through social transfers.

However, reducing child poverty is not just about income supports and welfare. Rather it is also about supporting parents to make the transition into employment and assisting families through the provision of quality affordable services in areas such as education, health and child-care.

Back to Education Allowance Eligibility

70. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on whether persons seeking employment wishing to upskill by completing a postgraduate degree are treated fairly by her Department. [39617/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Back to Education Allowance Scheme (BTEA) is designed to support second chance education. It enables eligible persons to pursue approved education courses and to continue to receive income support for the duration of a course of study, subject to meeting certain conditions. Access to BTEA at postgraduate level is available to persons who wish to pursue a postgraduate course of study that leads to a higher diploma (H-Dip) qualification in any discipline or to persons in pursuit of a professional masters of education (primary and secondary school teaching). In addition the BTEA is also available where a person is admitted to a master's programme based solely on life experience and provided the applicant is not the holder of any third level qualification.

The BTEA is not intended to be an alternative form of funding for people entering or re-entering the third level education system. The Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) Grant, payable by the Department of Education and Skills, represents the primary support for persons pursuing education. The eligibility rules that govern the payment of a student maintenance grant are a matter for that Department.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Programme

71. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the concerns raised regarding the impact that JobPath is having on community employment schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39441/17]

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. JobPath 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 Intreo office for assistance.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Child Poverty

72. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on whether Ireland will reach the child specific poverty target that is set out in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures - the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39440/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures), published by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in 2014, includes a target to reduce by two-thirds, the number of children in consistent poverty in 2011 by 2020. Meeting this target means lifting 102,000 children out of poverty. Under this Framework, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in collaboration with my Department and other relevant Departments is taking a whole-of-government approach to tackling child poverty. 2015 saw the first reduction in the number of children in consistent poverty since 2008. Compared to 2014, in 2015 there was a 13,000 or approximately 9 per cent decrease in the number of children in consistent poverty. The full impact of the recovery is not yet reflected in these figures. As unemployment is strongly linked to poverty, we can expect further decreases in poverty as the figures for 2016 and 2017 become available. The Government continues to focus on activation, to help people back into the workforce. However, it is clear that the target to reduce child poverty by

more than 100,000 children, or two thirds of the 2011 rate, is ambitious and may not be met.

Social transfers play a crucial role in alleviating poverty and inequality and Ireland is among the best in the EU for reducing poverty through social transfers.

However, reducing child poverty is not just about income supports and welfare. Rather it is also about supporting parents to make the transition into employment and assisting families through the provision of quality affordable services in areas such as education, health and child-care.

Question No. 73 answered with Question No. 66.

Taoiseach's Communications

74. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his telephone conversation with President el-Sisi of Egypt regarding a person (details supplied). [39631/17]

The Taoiseach: I spoke with Egyptian President, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi by telephone on Monday 28 August.

The call was instigated at my request to discuss the case of Irish Citizen, Ibrahim Halawa. I emphasised the importance the Irish Government places on the case and received assurances from the President that he would intervene, if necessary, following the announcement of a verdict to ensure that Ibrahim was returned home as soon as possible.

I wholeheartedly welcome the announcement on Monday that Ibrahim and his three sisters have been acquitted of all charges. I look forward to Ibrahim returning home to his family as soon as possible.

Cabinet Committees

75. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the number and titles of Cabinet committees; if they will meet regularly; and if he will chair each one. [39665/17]

118. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the Cabinet committees and the areas they will cover. [39099/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 75 and 118 together.

The Government has established the following six Cabinet Committees, which I will chair:

- Cabinet Committee A (Economy)
- Cabinet Committee B (Social Policy and Public Services)
- Cabinet Committee C (European Union including Brexit)
- Cabinet Committee D (Infrastructure)
- Cabinet Committee E (Health), and
- Cabinet Committee F (National Security).

They will meet as appropriate according to their work schedules.

Departmental Staff Data

76. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Taoiseach 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; and the duty or role of each, in each of the years 2015 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [36965/17]

The Taoiseach: The information requested by the Deputy is contained in the tables.

Department of the Taoiseach Political Staff 2015-2016

Job Title	Salary Scale
Chief of Staff	Deputy Secretary
Programme Manager	Deputy Secretary
Special Adviser to the Taoiseach (2)	Principal Officer
Personal Assistant to the Taoiseach (5)	Assistant Principal Officer
Personal Assistant to the Taoiseach (1)	Higher Executive Officer
Personal Secretary to the Taoiseach	Executive Officer
Personal Secretary to the Chief of Staff	Executive Officer
Government Press Secretary	Assistant Secretary
Assistant Government Press Secretary	Principal Officer
Deputy Government Press Secretary	Principal Officer
Chief Strategist for the Independent Alliance	Principal Officer
Political Coordinator for the Independent Ministers in Government	Principal Officer
Special Adviser to the Government Chief Whip	Principal Officer
Special Adviser to the Government Chief Whip	Principal Officer
Driver (Government Chief Whip)	Civilian Driver
Driver (Government Chief Whip)	Civilian Driver
Driver (Leader of the Seanad)	Civilian Driver
Driver (Leader of the Seanad)	Civilian Driver

Department of the Taoiseach Political Staff as of 18.09.2017

Job Title	Salary Scale
Chief of Staff	Deputy Secretary
Spokesman and Communications Adviser to the Taoiseach	Assistant Secretary
Head of Policy and Programme Implementation	Assistant Secretary
Special Adviser to the Taoiseach	Assistant Secretary (equivalent)
Special Adviser to the Taoiseach (2)	Principal Officer
Special Adviser to the Taoiseach	Assistant Principal Officer
Personal Assistant to the Taoiseach (2)	Higher Executive Officer

Job Title	Salary Scale
Government Press Secretary	Assistant Secretary
Assistant Government Press Secretary	Principal Officer
Deputy Government Press Secretary	Principal Officer
Chief Strategist for the Independent Alliance	Principal Officer
Political Coordinator for the Independent Ministers in Government	Principal Officer
Special Adviser to the Government Chief Whip	Principal Officer
Special Adviser to the Government Chief Whip	Principal Officer
Driver (Government Chief Whip)	Civilian Driver
Driver (Government Chief Whip)	Civilian Driver
Driver (Leader of the Seanad)	Civilian Driver
Driver (Leader of the Seanad)	Civilian Driver

Secondees to the Department of the Taoiseach

Salary Scale	Dec-15	Dec-16	to date 2017
Clerical Officer	8	5	4
Executive Officer	1	1	1
Higher Executive Officer	6	7	5
Administrative Officer	5	0	1
Assistant Principal Officer	14	11	6
Principal Officer	4	4	2
Assistant Secretary General	0	0	2
Second Secretary General	1	0	0
Total	39	28	21

Departmental Staff Data

77. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach 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. [39025/17]

79. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach the number of women and men, respectively, employed in his Department, in tabular form. [39027/17]

80. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach the number of men and women, respectively, in his Department that hold posts (details supplied). [39028/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 77, 79 and 80 together.

The information requested by the Deputy is contained in the tables.

Public Service Staff Under Aegis of Department of the Taoiseach by Gender

Year	Staff	Female	Male	% Female
2010	21	13	8	61.9

Questions - Written Answers

Year	Staff	Female	Male	% Female
2011	21	13	8	61.9
2012	22	14	8	63.6
2013	21	13	8	61.9
2014	19	12	7	63.1
2015	18	11	7	61.1
2016	18	10	8	55.5
to date 2017	20	12	8	60.0

Department of the Taoiseach Staff by Gender (to date 2017)

Post	Total	Female	Male
Secretary General	1		1
Second Secretary General	1		1
Deputy Secretary			
Assistant Secretary	6	2	4
Principal Officer	11	6	5
Assistant Principal Officer	34	22	12

Department of the Taoiseach Staff by Gender (to date 2017)

Staff Total	Female	Male
216	131	85

Departmental Agencies Staff Data

78. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach 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. [39026/17]

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

Year	Total Staff	WTE	No. Women	% Women Staff Based on Total Staff	% Women Staff Based on WTE
2010	21	19.4	13	61.9	67.0
2011	21	19.2	13	61.9	67.7
2012	20	18.2	13	65.0	71.4
2013	19	17.2	12	63.7	69.8
2014	18	16.6	11	61.1	66.2
2015	17	15.7	10	58.8	63.7
2016	17	15.7	10	58.8	63.7
2017	17	15.3	11	64.7	71.9

Questions Nos. 79 and 80 answered with Question No. 77.

Departmental Banking

81. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Taoiseach the cost his 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. [39029/17]

The Taoiseach: The costs incurred by my Department from 1st January 2012 to the end of August 2017 in relation to charges related to debit and credit card payment services and banking fees are set out below. The majority of the below amounts relates to Government Stamp Duty levy on cards in operation in my Department.

	Bank of Ireland	Ulster Bank Ireland Ltd.
2012	€300	
2013	€210	
2014	€245	
2015	€210	€240
2016		€60
2017		€175

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

82. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his meeting with Mr. Philip Hammond on 31 August 2017. [39030/17]

113. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he has spoken to Prime Minister May since Sinn Féin rejected the proposal for a pathway for talks to enable Stormont to be reconvened within a certain timeframe. [39092/17]

114. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his visit to Northern Ireland recently; and the meetings he attended. [39093/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 82, 113 and 114 together.

I undertook my first official visit to Belfast as Taoiseach on 4 and 5 August last.

I had a number of engagements during my visit, including giving a keynote address in Queens University on the "Future of Relationships North and South". I also hosted a lunch with leading business leaders from Northern Ireland during the visit.

My visit provided a useful opportunity for me to meet with leaders of most of the political parties in Northern Ireland to discuss the ongoing political situation there. We discussed the need for all parties to continue to make every effort to get the institutions of the Agreement up and running again as soon as possible and how we can work together to address the challenges facing Northern Ireland.

I also attended the Official Pride Breakfast in Belfast before concluding my visit.

I spoke by phone with Prime Minister May most recently on June 27 when we discussed the ongoing talks process in Northern Ireland and our strong commitment to supporting the peace process as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement. We agreed to continue to work together to support the parties in reaching agreement to allow the re-establishment of the Northern Ireland Executive and the need to have all of the institutions under the Agreement up and running to ensure ongoing protection of the peace process. I re-iterated the Irish Government's support for an Irish Language Act, as provided for in the St Andrews Agreement, and the need for balance and respect between the parties. I am due to meet with Prime Minister May again in

London next Monday, when I expect we will again talk about the situation in Northern Ireland and, of course, Brexit.

I met with the British Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond during his recent visit to Dublin on 31 August. We spoke about the serious issues arising as the UK negotiates its departure from the European Union. I underlined to the Chancellor the importance of making sufficient progress on the phase one issues currently under discussion, namely citizens' rights, financial matters, and of course, the unique Irish issues. I made clear the Government's objective that there should be no new impediments to the all-island economy which has been able to develop over the last two decades and which is a gain of the peace process that benefits communities across the island.

Trade Missions

83. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his recent trade mission to Canada; if he will further report on his meeting with Prime Minister Trudeau; and the issues that were discussed. [39031/17]

The Taoiseach: I travelled to Canada between 19-23 August.

My visit commenced in Montréal with an official welcoming ceremony and a bilateral meeting with the Prime Minister. During our meeting we discussed the provisional implementation of CETA which commences tomorrow, September 21. We discussed the latest developments on Brexit and Ireland's priorities in the negotiations. Prime Minister Trudeau updated me on the latest state of play with regards to the NAFTA negotiations. In the context of a wider conversation on healthcare, I updated the Prime Minister on plans to hold a constitutional referendum on the Eighth Amendment. We also discussed Climate Change and reaffirmed both our countries' commitment to the Paris Agreement.

Following our meeting, Prime Minister Trudeau and I walked together in the Fierté Montréal Pride Parade. I also met with leaders and representatives of the Irish community in Montréal and wider Quebec region, before travelling to Toronto.

In Toronto I had a number of business engagements including a business breakfast event attended by 150 contacts of the joint hosts, Enterprise Ireland, the Ireland Canada Chamber of Commerce and the Ireland Funds. I attended a Tourism Ireland event with representatives of the travel industry and airlines, and a number of individual meetings with IDA and EI client companies. I also had the opportunity to meet with political and community leaders and members of the Irish diaspora, including representatives of the Irish Canadian Immigration Centre, at an Irish Community Reception.

Also in Toronto, I attended a ceremony to mark the start of construction of the new Dr. George Robert Grasett Park, which will be a memorial to the medical staff who gave their lives to aid Irish famine victims.

During my visit I also travelled to the US-Canada border where I was briefed on Customs arrangements there. While they employ a range of mechanisms to ensure smooth and efficient customs processing it was clear to me that it was not a satisfactory model for border arrangements on this island after Brexit.

Finally, I also had a number of international media engagements.

Overall, my visit to Canada was extremely positive and an excellent opportunity to further

develop the strong links between our two countries.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

84. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his trip to County Donegal; and if a member of GIS or the strategic communications unit travelled with him. [39032/17]

Taoiseach (Leo Varadkar): I was briefed on the extent of the flood damage on arrival in Carndonagh. I then visited damaged areas and talked to those directly affected. I also spoke to local and national media on actions being taken by Government. I then visited flood damaged areas in Buncrana and received further briefing on the remedial action being undertaken to address the situation.

As is normal practice a press officer accompanied me on the visit.

Strategic Communications Unit

85. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the strategic communications unit in his Department; and the way in which it will relate to each Government Department. [39034/17]

87. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the reporting relationship within the strategic communications unit; and the way in which it relates daily to the GIS. [39036/17]

88. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the way in which the strategic communications unit can be cost-neutral; and if this will change. [39037/17]

89. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if the Government press secretary is part of the strategic communications unit; and the reporting relationship in this unit. [39038/17]

90. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will differentiate the role of the Government press secretary and that of the new strategic communications unit. [39039/17]

91. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the measures he has taken to ensure that the strategic communications unit in his Department is not or does not become party political. [39040/17]

92. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the way in which the strategic communications unit will complement existing arrangements within his Department yet work independently from the GIS. [39041/17]

93. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the audit of the public relations and communications work across Departments and the agencies under their remit; the person who will receive the final report; the person or group that is undertaking the report; the cost of the report; and the person or group that will be responsible for implementing the recommendations therein. [39042/17]

94. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the reason the strategic communications unit is being established on a permanent basis within his Department; the reason the positions therein were not advertised to allow for open competition; if the staff employed within the unit will be civil servants; the type of contracts they will have; and the salaries of each. [39043/17]

96. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the number of vacancies in the GIS; if the recruitment process has been commenced to fill the positions; and the salary scales they will have. [39045/17]

97. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if the strategic communications unit will be concentrating on social media activity or if it will be involved in all aspects of communication; and the way in which duplication with GIS will be avoided. [39046/17]

101. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Taoiseach further to the establishment of the new strategic communications unit, the number of staff hired to date in 2017; the number of staff he plans to hire in the future; the salaries of the staff hired to date in 2017; if persons in the unit have been transferred from elsewhere in the Civil Service or recruited externally; the cost to date in 2017 of establishing the unit; and the function of the unit. [39062/17]

103. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach if the public servants working in the strategic communications unit have been or are being replaced in their substantive original posts; the amount this will cost; the number working in the unit; the number envisaged to be employed in the unit in totality; and the costs of same. [39064/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 85, 87 to 94, inclusive, 96, 97, 101 and 103 together.

Communications is an essential part of effectiveness of any modern organisation. That is particularly true of Government Departments and public service bodies in all countries, given the impact of their activities on the lives of citizens. That is why communications should be treated as a strategic, whole of government activity which should be conducted to the same level of professionalism as any other activity, such as human resource management or financial management.

Ireland should aspire to meet best international practice, and we are seeking to draw on the experience of other countries in this regard.

The new Strategic Communications Unit aims to help achieve that, over time.

It will be integrated within the Civil Service structures in my Department, with the Director of the unit reporting to the Secretary General of the Department. A high-level working group, chaired by the Secretary General, will be established to ensure successful oversight and delivery of the workplan of the unit.

Further cross-Departmental oversight will be provided by the Civil Service Management Board.

The operating principles for the unit will ensure that it does not engage in any party political work.

The unit will convene briefings and consultations across Government, including with Ministers, and with wider stakeholders, as appropriate. A network of communications professionals from across Government will be developed to share best practice and develop continuing professional development for the communication function.

The unit has commenced work but further organisational change will be required before it is fully operational.

The current staff of the unit is made up of six serving public and civil servants, assigned on secondment or through reallocation of internal resources within the Department of the Taoiseach.

ach. It is headed by a Director, on secondment from a state agency, at Assistant Secretary level. The other five staff have been reassigned from within the Department. Further staff will be recruited, including through the assignment of three media and communications assistants who were already in the process of recruitment to fill existing vacancies through an open competition run by the Public Appointments Service.

The former GIS function will be integrated within the new structure, while the Government Press Office will continue to operate as before in dealing with day-to-day media queries, under the direction of the Government Press Secretary.

It is likely that further vacancies will be filled through advertisement for staff on secondment from within the Public Service. As with all other positions, the possibility of open recruitment will be considered if that is considered to be the best method to obtain staff with the required skills. These staffing decisions will be made by the Department's senior management.

Every effort will be made to avoid duplication with existing functions, both within the Department of the Taoiseach and across the public service. Indeed, one of the principal purposes of this initiative is to reduce duplication and increase whole of government co-ordination.

As well as increasing the effectiveness and quality of communications, this will also lead to greater value for money and reduced expenditure.

As an initial step in establishing the modernisation of communications, my Department conducted some research on existing communications activities, including the range of campaigns, brands and channels of communication used by different agencies, and which have built up over many years, under successive governments. The results of that research will be used by civil service management to help frame the work plan for the new unit.

Of course, most of the existing communication activities are an essential part of the work of state agencies, in areas such as transport, tourism, trade and investment promotion, food, energy and health.

Nevertheless, there are significant opportunities for building the effectiveness of that existing capacity, as well as for rationalisation.

This will ensure that the new approach to strategic communications will be cost-neutral. In fact, it is likely to give rise to a significant increase in value for money and a reduction in overall expenditure, over time.

Departmental Staff Data

86. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the number of persons employed as policy, special and communications advisers that are not civil servants. [39035/17]

The Taoiseach: One of my advisers is a public servant on secondment to my Department from Trinity College Dublin. All other advisers are (unestablished) civil servants.

Questions Nos. 87 to 94, inclusive, answered with Question No. 85.

Departmental Communications

95. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the person responsible for his weekly

messages on social media; and if these are arranged by party staff rather than those employed in his Department. [39044/17]

The Taoiseach: The Taoiseach's weekly messages on social media are generally recorded by a member of his political or press staff.

Questions Nos. 96 and 97 answered with Question No. 85.

Community Development Projects

98. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Taoiseach the estimated cost of the works to be undertaken as part of the Dublin north inner city project. [39047/17]

The Taoiseach: Government has committed to implementing the recommendations of Kieran Mulvey's Independent Report on the North East Inner City in full.

As recommended in the report, a number of structures have been put in place to drive forward progress on the actions. These include the Programme Implementation Board comprising statutory, community and business sector led by an Independent chairperson, Michael Stone.

Since its first meeting in June the Board has moved quickly to establish four dedicated sub-groups to focus on the priority areas of crime and drugs; educational, training and employment opportunities; services for families and young people; and physical improvements. The Board is being supported in its work by a Local Programme Office which has been established by Dublin City Council in Sean McDermott Street.

The purpose of each sub-group is to advance the specific actions set out in the Mulvey Report and report monthly to the Programme Implementation Board on progress. This will include developing more detailed measures, where required, to address these actions and recommending/identifying steps to address barriers or issues arising. While this work is ongoing, the Board has agreed a number of proposals across the four priority headings for implementation in 2017 at a cost of €2.5 million. This is in addition to the range of local measures already implemented in 2016 worth about €5 million.

Public Services Card

99. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Taoiseach if the 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; and if so, the services and payments which will now be dependent on the mandatory use of the public services card. [39059/17]

The Taoiseach: Neither my Department nor the National Economic and Social Development Office (NESDO), have any plans to make services or payments dependent on the use and production of the public services card.

Departmental Expenditure

100. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Taoiseach 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. [39060/17]

The Taoiseach: My Department is currently engaging with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on its 2018 Estimate provision. Any expenditure savings will be identified as part of that process and announced by the Minister for Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform at Budget-time.

Question No. 101 answered with Question No. 85.

Central Statistics Office Reports

102. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach the likely publication date of Irish Life Tables 17 by the Central Statistics Office. [39063/17]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Joe McHugh): The Central Statistics Office intends to publish Irish Life Tables No. 17 (2015-2017) in 2019, three years after the 2016 census. The corresponding Irish Life Tables No. 16 (2010-2012) were published in 2015, four years after the 2011 census. Irish Life Tables are calculated based on population data from the census, and three years mortality data centred on the census year. Thus, Irish Life Tables No. 17 will be based on population data from the 2016 census, and mortality data from the years 2015, 2016, and 2017.

Question No. 103 answered with Question No. 85.

Brexit Issues

104. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the re-organisation of his Department and its role in the State's response to Brexit. [39065/17]

The Taoiseach: The Department of the Taoiseach has an amalgamated International, EU and Northern Ireland Division headed by a Second Secretary General, who also acts as the Irish Sherpa for EU business, including Brexit issues.

The work of this Division includes supporting the Cabinet Committee which deals with EU Affairs and Brexit. In particular, this Cabinet Committee will assist the Government in its ongoing consideration of Brexit issues including input to the negotiation process, both on the issues that are of unique or particular concern to Ireland, and more generally. The Division also supports me in my EU and International role, including as a Member of the European Council.

Staff in other divisions also contribute to the work on Brexit. For example the Economic Policy Division advises me on economic policy aimed at supporting sustainable economic growth, with a particular focus on jobs and competitiveness including possible economic impacts of Brexit.

Brexit Staff

105. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Taoiseach the number of vacancies in his Department for Brexit-related roles; and the expected date for these roles to be filled. [39074/17]

106. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach 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. [39079/17]

107. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach the number of staff deployed full-time in his Department in respect of Brexit; and if there is a designated section or unit to deal with Brexit. [39080/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 105 to 107, inclusive, together.

My Department is keen to ensure that Brexit is treated as a cross-cutting issue and one of the new Cabinet Committees which I have established will deal specifically with EU issues and the Brexit negotiations.

Within my Department, the International, EU and Northern Ireland Division handles issues relating to the European Union and British-Irish and Northern Ireland Affairs, including providing support to the new Cabinet Committee.

I have, separately, appointed Simon Coveney as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, with special responsibility for Brexit.

This International, EU and Northern Ireland Division in my Department is headed by a Second Secretary General. The staff resources vary from time to time but currently amount to approximately 25 full-time equivalent posts across the full range of policy areas.

The Economic Division of my Department leads in respect of the domestic policy impacts of Brexit, in the context of overall economic policy coordination.

There is no dedicated budget for Brexit in my Department. Any such expenditure incurred by my Department is covered by the Department's overall administrative budget.

Departmental Expenditure

108. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach 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. [39081/17]

The Taoiseach: All building and maintenance projects relating to the property occupied by my Department are managed by the Office of Public Works. My Department has not been involved in any construction projects during the period mentioned.

Brexit Data

109. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Taoiseach the number of times the Brexit committee within his Department has met since 14 June 2017; and the dates of those meetings. [39082/17]

The Taoiseach: The Government decided on 5 July 2017 to establish Cabinet Committee C, to cover issues relating to the European Union, including Brexit.

Cabinet Committee C has met once, on Monday 11 September.

Office of Director of Public Prosecutions

110. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Taoiseach the annual Exchequer funding provided to the Director of Public Prosecutions in each of the past ten years and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [38446/17]

The Taoiseach: I am informed by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions that the following tables outline the details requested by the Deputy.

YEAR	GROSS ESTIMATE€000	APPROPRIATIONS-IN-AID€000	NET ESTIMATE€000
2017	41,588	912	40,676

YEAR	GROSS EXPENDITURE €000	APPROPRIATIONS-IN-AID €000	NET EXPENDITURE €000
2007	34,468	135	34,333
2008	44,362	117	44,245
2009	45,687	901	44,786
2010	42,384	1031	41,353
2011	37,820	1043	36,777
2012	39,890	1043	38,847
2013	37,145	996	36,149
2014	37,675	973	36,702
2015	38,622	953	37,669
2016	39,451	825	38,626

Commissions of Investigation

111. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach the cost of the Commission of Investigation into Irish Bank Resolution Corporation. [38527/17]

116. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will provide an update on the status of the IBRC inquiry. [39097/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 111 and 116 together.

The IBRC Commission was established on 16 June 2015 under the Commission of Investigation (Irish Bank Resolution Corporation) Order 2015. Mr. Justice Brian Cregan, a judge of the High Court, is the Commission's sole member. The timeframe for the final report on the first module of its work, in relation to the Siteserv transaction, is the end of December 2017.

The Commission spent €2,389,983 million up to 7 September 2017. The Commission also indicated in its Interim Report dated 15 April 2016 that significant third party costs had been incurred which are likely to arise for payment in due course.

The Dail was informed in July 2016, when the Commission's terms of reference were revised, that the Commission had provided a provisional estimated final cost of in excess of €10 million.

Brexit Issues

112. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if the fact that the Government would not be bringing forward proposals on a border on the island of Ireland was mentioned when

he met Prime Minister May in June 2017 or when he spoke to her in subsequent phone calls. [39091/17]

Taoiseach (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As I have already reported to the House, in my June meeting with Prime Minister May, we reaffirmed our two Governments' commitment to maintaining the Common Travel Area and associated reciprocal rights, to protecting the Peace Process and, in particular, to keeping the border invisible.

But we also recognise that this will be extremely challenging and, in the words of the EU negotiation guidelines, will require "flexible and imaginative" solutions. This Government will certainly play its part in working constructively with all our partners – in Northern Ireland, in Britain and across the EU – to find solutions that are in the best interests of everyone on these islands.

In August, the UK Government published position papers on Future Customs Arrangements and Northern Ireland and Ireland as part of the Brexit negotiation process. The Government has welcomed these publications as providing some clarity from the British Government on its approach to the negotiations, and as reflecting the emphasis on the priority areas identified by the Government, including the Common Travel Area, the Good Friday Agreement, North/South cooperation and avoiding a hard border.

The Government has also underlined that protecting the Peace Process is crucial and must not become a bargaining chip in the negotiations and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade has made clear that far greater clarity will be required from the UK on the critical issue of avoiding any return to a hard border while respecting the integrity of the Single Market and the Customs Union.

As stated in the European Commission Task Force's paper on Guiding Principles for Ireland / Northern Ireland the onus to propose solutions which overcome the challenges created on the island of Ireland by the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union and its decision to leave the customs union and the internal market remains on the United Kingdom.

Questions Nos. 113 and 114 answered with Question No. 82.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

115. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he commenced formal meetings with the church leaders under the structured dialogue process. [39095/17]

The Taoiseach: On 31 August last, I held a formal meeting under the structured dialogue process with representatives of the Catholic Church, led by Archbishop Eamon Martin. I was accompanied at the meeting by the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation and by the Ministers for Education and Skills, Health, Transport, Tourism and Sport and Employment Affairs and Social Protection. A wide ranging discussion took place on a range of important national and international issues.

This was the first in a series of meetings that I will be holding with dialogue partners.

Question No. 116 answered with Question No. 111.

Departmental Operations

117. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he has made changes to sections of his Department since assuming office. [39098/17]

The Taoiseach: Since assuming the office of Taoiseach, I have appointed four Ministers of State to portfolios in my Department:

Joe McHugh, TD, is Government Chief Whip;

Helen McEntee, TD, has responsibility for European Affairs;

Paul Kehoe, TD, has responsibility for Defence; and

Pat Breen, TD, has responsibility for Data Protection.

In addition, I have made changes to the Cabinet Committee structure which supports the work of Government. The Cabinet Committees I will chair are as follows:

- Cabinet Committee A (Economy);
- Cabinet Committee B (Social Policy and Public Services);
- Cabinet Committee C (European Union including Brexit);
- Cabinet Committee D (Infrastructure);
- Cabinet Committee E (Health); and
- Cabinet Committee F (National Security).

I have also established a Strategic Communications Unit in my Department. The purpose of the Unit is twofold:

- to create a coherent, citizen-oriented, cross-government strategic communications capability to inform the public of their entitlements, of what Government is doing, and of how their money is being spent; and
- to deliver effective vertical and horizontal flows of information, analysis and assessment to enhance the capacity of all Government assets to operate collectively, coherently, strategically and with focus.

All staff from the Government Information Service have been reassigned to this Unit. Appropriate resources will be allocated to successfully operate the Unit which will be cost neutral to the exchequer; with staff and funds to be allocated from within existing resources.

Question No. 118 answered with Question No. 75.

Taoiseach's Communications

119. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his telephone conversation with President el-Sisi of Egypt in August 2017. [39105/17]

The Taoiseach: I spoke with Egyptian President, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi by telephone on Monday 28 August.

The call was instigated at my request to discuss the case of Irish Citizen, Ibrahim Halawa. I emphasised the importance the Irish Government places on the case and received assurances

from the President that he would intervene, if necessary, following the announcement of a verdict to ensure that Ibrahim was returned home as soon as possible.

I wholeheartedly welcome the announcement on Monday that Ibrahim and his three sisters have been acquitted of all charges. I look forward to Ibrahim returning home to his family as soon as possible.

Trade Strategy

120. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach further to his announcement in Toronto regarding doubling Ireland's global footprint by 2025, the way in which this will be achieved; and if finances will be made available for same. [39106/17]

The Taoiseach: While in Canada recently I announced a plan to double Ireland's global footprint by 2025.

It is clear that there is a new self-confidence in Ireland, as an island at the centre of the world and that national self-confidence requires that we always be ambitious, visible and active in promoting the interests of our nation on the international stage.

I expect that this initiative will involve new and augmented diplomatic missions, as well as an increased presence of our investment, tourism, cultural and food agencies overseas.

I have asked relevant Ministers, including the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, to contribute to development of a plan to achieve this. This will include consideration of the resource implications, including identifying where efficiencies can be achieved through innovative approaches and potential savings elsewhere.

Expanding our global presence will help to drive efforts to diversify and grow trade, including in the context of Brexit; enhance our ability to attract investment to Ireland; as well as help us to strengthen links with our diaspora; and to advance our values, interests, reputation and impact internationally.

Quarterly National Household Survey

121. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the reason the Quarter 2 2017 figures for the Quarterly National Household Survey have been rescheduled. [38309/17]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Joe McHugh): The CSO's Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) is currently the official source of estimates of Labour Market statistics in the State.

The rescheduling of the publication of the Q2 2017 QNHS results from August 22nd to September 22nd 2017 arose due to the phased implementation of a major redevelopment of the CSO's household surveys. The primary aim of the Household Survey Development (HSD) project is to expand the range of social statistics to meet new needs for information on households and persons. The implementation of the HSD will see the compilation of Labour Market statistics from a new Labour Force Survey (LFS) for Q3 2017. This survey will replace the existing QNHS and will see the introduction of Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI), a redesigned questionnaire and enhancements to the survey methodology.

In order to produce comparable Labour Market estimates it was necessary to conduct a full

parallel run of the new LFS and the existing QNHS during the first two quarters of 2017 and this dual processing led to the delay in publishing data for the QNHS for Q2 2017. It is envisaged that the Q3 2017 estimates will be published by the end of January 2018 with Q4 2017 results following in February 2018. This will see the CSO's Labour Market estimates returning to existing timeliness targets.

Tribunals of Inquiry Expenditure

122. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach the expenditure in 2016 and in 2017 on the Moriarty tribunal; and if he will report on the areas of expenditure and the amount, for example of legal fees and so on. [37521/17]

The Taoiseach: Expenditure in 2016 was €1,085,971 and up to end August in 2017 was €5,939,462.

The breakdown is as follows:

Category	2016	2017 to end August 2017
Legal Team	€379,285	€272,495
Administration	€201,205	€162,607
Reimbursements to State Claims Agency iro third party claims	€181,057	€5,493,524
Other costs	€324,424	€10,836

Enterprise Data

123. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach the average enterprise start-up rate in each EU country as measured by new companies started as a percentage of total companies in a given year; and if he will provide the EU 28 average rate in tabular form. [38300/17]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Joe McHugh): European Business Demography statistics measure the population of active enterprises in each Member State and include figures on the number of enterprise births (startups). An enterprise birth is deemed to occur the first year it shows activity (i.e. it generates turnover, employs staff or makes investments). The birth year may or may not be the same as the year of registration. The latest breakdown of the number of enterprise births available from Eurostat is for the year 2015. The figures relate to enterprises in the private business economy, i.e. private sector businesses in the Industry, Construction, and Services sectors (NACE Rev 2 codes B to N, excluding code 64.20 "Activities of Holding Companies") as classified by the CSO.

The following table contains the enterprise birth figures and birth rate by country for the years 2014 and 2015

Table 1 - Number of Enterprise Births and Birth rate in the Private Business Economy by EU country, 2014 and 2015

			2014			2015
	No. of Enterprises	No. of Births	%Birth Rate	No. of Enterprises	No. of Births	%Birth Rate

Questions - Written Answers

			2014			2015
EU (28 countries)	26,307,386	2,586,423	9.83	:	:	:
Belgium	634,384	39,070	6.16	642,130	41,102	6.40
Bulgaria	332,800	39,333	11.82	339,175	40,358	11.90
Czech Rep.	1,022,045	93,360	9.13	1,026,355	85,645	8.34
Denmark	217,960	24,283	11.14	:	:	:
Germany	2,818,836	202,984	7.20	2,795,899	198,135	7.09
Estonia	80,473	8,631	10.73	82,769	8,512	10.28
Ireland	238,249	16,257	6.82	248,843	18,100	7.27
Greece	:	:	:	:	:	:
Spain	2,943,908	287,611	9.77	2,970,947	274,172	9.23
France	3,414,614	339,075	9.93	:	:	:
Croatia	146,766	11,411	7.77	146,129	12,185	8.34
Italy	3,846,659	274,489	7.14	3,819,956	279,132	7.31
Cyprus	49,121	3,375	6.87	:	:	:
Latvia	100,979	15,194	15.05	110,310	19,003	17.23
Lithuania	177,752	43,543	24.50	185,954	34,490	18.55
Luxembourg	31,246	3,134	10.03	31,906	2,989	9.37
Hungary	522,058	52,101	9.98	531,121	56,799	10.69
Malta	31,841	3,599	11.30	:	:	:
Netherlands	1,075,534	108,786	10.11	1,112,691	107,946	9.70
Austria	419,779	29,480	7.02	413,929	28,311	6.84
Poland	2,025,270	253,061	12.50	2,059,967	249,815	12.13
Portugal	793,457	117,168	14.77	:	:	:
Romania	696,142	70,912	10.19	695,108	79,496	11.44
Slovenia	137,438	15,158	11.03	141,118	15,154	10.74
Slovakia	438,067	86,672	19.79	446,471	53,899	12.07
Finland	293,808	23,002	7.83	:	:	:
Sweden	727,258	52,606	7.23	740,182	53,185	7.19
UK	2,218,955	316,540	14.27	:	:	:

: Indicates that the data is not available.

Brexit Issues

124. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on a Brexit regional adjustment fund to provide the regions with new trade routes and to upgrade existing ones; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39054/17]

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 across all regions of the country, to address challenges arising from the UK's decision to leave the EU. 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.

Work Permits Applications

125. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if an application for a work permit can be reviewed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39636/17]

140. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if an application for a work permit can be reviewed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39635/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 125 and 140 together.

An application for an employment permit was received in the Department on 27 January 2017 with decision to refuse the granting of the application advised by letter dated 23rd March 2017. In line with Employment Permits legislation, applications must be supported by certain criteria and requirements depending on the employment permit type. This application was refused on the basis that the applicant failed to provide necessary documentation as laid down in the legislation and that the application failed to meet the requirements of the Labour Market Needs Test as required by the legislation.

Section 13 of the Employment Permits Act 2006 (as amended) enables an applicant to seek a review of a decision by submitting the relevant form within 28 days of date of the decision letter. In this case, a review was sought and, having considered all the information available, the decision to refuse the granting of the employment permit was upheld as advised to the applicant in a letter dated 28th July 2017.

A refusal to grant an employment permit does not preclude an applicant from submitting another application for an employment permit. Such an application should comply with all of the legislative requirements pertaining to that employment permit type, including the requirements of the Labour Market Needs Test should it be applicable.

126. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the ownership status of an IDA Ireland site (details supplied) in County Galway; the lease agreement on the site; if a lease agreement is in place; IDA Ireland's plans to develop another site in the town; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39083/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): IDA Ireland property holdings in Tuam include a 14 hectare Business Park and an 11 hectare Business & Technology Park.

The Business Park was developed in the 1980s and received an infrastructural upgrade between 2012 and 2013 whilst the Business & Technology Park was developed in 2000. Both parks are held under IDA freehold title with tenants on long term lease agreements.

The table outlines the current status of each park. I am advised by IDA Ireland that there is sufficient property capacity in both to accommodate further foreign direct investment.

Current Status of IDA Property Holdings in Tuam

Ref	Park	Remaining IDA lands circa.	Client Base
IDA Business Park	Business Park	2 Ha	Valeo Transitions OpticalSSL Logistics Unilokomotive Conveyors and Packaging Logstup
New IDA Bus and Tech Park	Business and Technology Park	10 Ha	Valeo short licence for R and D test area

Research Funding

127. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department conducted an analysis on the TRL status of research projects funding by agencies under its aegis. [39159/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My Department through its agencies funds research activities and supports for innovation across the full range of Technology Readiness Levels. Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) are a measure of the maturity or proximity to market of a technology. Lower TRLs (1-3) include demonstration of basic principles through to proof of concept. Medium TRLs (4-7) span technology validation and prototype demonstration and higher TRLs (8-9) refer to pre-commercial deployment up to market introduction.

Science Foundation Ireland reviews its portfolio of awards in the context of each award's Technology Readiness Level (TRL) status. Science Foundation Ireland has adopted the TRL reference scale as described by the H2020 Programme. Science Foundation Ireland awards span TRL 1-6, with most of Science Foundation Ireland's portfolio of investment in TRL 1 and 2.

In 2016, SFI undertook an exercise to map its active award portfolio against TRL levels. This indicated that a little over 80% of Science Foundation Ireland's portfolio of investment was in TRLs 1 and 2.

It is expected that in due course and with Science Foundation Ireland's expanded remit that there will be an increasing level of activity and investments in the higher TRL levels up to 6 and

7. SFI's mid- and high TRL investments will grow in the future, however, given the Innovation 2020 strategy and national plans to increase public investment in STEM research, a substantial proportion of SFI's investment will continue to be in the lower TRLs.

Enterprise Ireland (EI) supports innovation either through direct in-company R&D grants to firms or through supports aimed at driving collaboration between firms and the higher education institutes (HEIs); or the commercialisation of research.

Enterprise Ireland has also mapped its portfolio of R&D supports. Typically, EI Innovation Partnerships support research projects at TRLs 4-8; EI/IDA Ireland Technology Centres support collaboration at TRLs 4-8; EI Technology Gateways at TRLs 6-8; EI Innovation Vouchers at TRLs 7 and 8; and direct grants to support in-company R&D projects at TRLs 7-9.

Institutes of Technology

128. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department has carried out an analysis of the impact of SME research supports developed in institutes of technology with aid from Enterprise Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39173/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Enterprise Ireland (EI) funds small industry facing “gateways” in Institutes of Technology (IOT), aimed at providing technology solutions for companies in a particular sector and, where possible, within a region.

Up to €23 million will be invested in the Enterprise Ireland Technology Gateways Programme between 2013 – 2017 in order to leverage the capabilities of the Institutes of Technology on behalf of industry in Ireland. Currently there is a network of 15 Gateways based in 11 different IoTs providing open access to industry.

The Technology Gateways provide the Institutes of Technology with dedicated resources which work with industry to articulate their problems in a manner that can be addressed by the Institute's research base. The individual Gateways target industry sectors relevant to the Institutes of Technology's core research capability. The role of the Gateway staff is to manage the interaction between the companies and the Institute, help the companies source funding where necessary, and ensure projects are delivered successfully.

An independent evaluation was carried out in 2016 on the Technology Gateway Programme and it found that the programme has helped businesses to secure an extra €59m turnover, equivalent to €5.07 for each €1.00 of Enterprise Ireland investment. By 2018, the Programme will have helped businesses to secure an extra €279m of turnover, equivalent to €15.42 for each €1.00 of Enterprise Ireland investment.

The evaluation also found that the Programme has been very successful in engaging industry, with some Gateways reporting over 100 companies now working with them. From a company perspective levels of satisfaction were high overall, with the majority of interviewed companies (75%) describing their engagement as “very satisfied” and 20% as “satisfied”; and 95% of companies indicating they would recommend the Gateway to another company in Ireland.

In addition, a wide range of benefits were cited by companies. These included:

- improved technological knowledge and an increase in the overall value of the company

- an improvement in businesses abilities with most companies developing a culture of innovation
- access to further capital to develop their business, cited by over one third (39%) of companies
- development of new products, cited by 63% of the companies

The evaluation found that almost 20% of companies reported that they could not have grown or would not have survived without the support of the Gateway.

Workplace Safety

129. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of reports that have been made to the Health and Safety Authority since the beginning of 2017 regarding unsafe climbing and operation of construction site cranes by unqualified and under-qualified personnel or unsafe use of construction cranes; the number of inspections by HSA personnel that followed; and the findings in each instance. [39175/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I am informed by the Health and Safety Authority that since the beginning of 2017 there have been thirty-five (35) reports or complaints made to the Authority pertaining to the issues referred to in the Deputy's question.

In line with the Authority's normal operational policies, where specific complaints are made to the Authority its response can include engagement with the duty holder through the Workplace Contact Unit and/or complaint investigation by the inspectorate.

The Authority's response to each individual complaint is based on the opinion of the individual inspector, based on the facts and evidence obtained at the sites that directs any enforcement action to be taken. The inspectors assigned by the Authority to the complaints relating to crane operation have relevant professional qualifications and extensive construction inspection and investigation experience.

The Authority has advised that in relation to the complaints received in 2017 in relation to crane use on construction sites the following indicates a breakdown of the findings which are based on twenty (20) site investigations and fifteen (15) interventions by the Authority's workplace contact unit and inspectors.

It was found that in 62% of instances the inspector found there was no evidence to substantiate the complaint or that the evidence that was provided to the Authority, that indicated the complaint, could not be substantiated.

In 9% of instances the site or work to which the complaint related was complete and therefore the complaint could not be investigated.

It was also found that in 23% of instances that there was some evidence to support the complaint and in all these circumstances the Authority issued written advice to the duty holder to remedy the matters observed.

In one case there was found to be clear evidence to support the complaint and a Prohibition Notice was served on site.

In one other case a dangerous occurrence was verified by the Authority. In this case the

workplace contact unit made contact with the company involved and discussed the allegations. The company acknowledged that an incident had occurred. A completed reportable dangerous occurrence for (IR3 Form) was requested from the company. A formal site investigation also took place and it was found that the company has taken appropriate remedial actions including ‘standing down’ the contractor involved for 2 days, retraining of personnel involved, disciplinary actions on workers responsible, and a safety alert to all other sites under their control.

Health and Safety Authority

130. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of whole-time equivalents qualified to conduct workplace inspections that are employed by the Health and Safety Authority; and the number employed in 2008. [39176/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) currently has 95.9 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff in the inspector grades who are qualified to carry out inspections. It is currently in the latter stages of recruiting 11 inspectors who, subject to passing of medical examinations and the acceptance of contracts, should be able to start work in quarter 4 of this year.

On December 31 2008 the HSA had 124.8 FTE staff in the inspector grades who were qualified to carry out inspections.

The majority of staff in the inspector grades carry out workplace inspections and the remainder carry out a wide range of other activities such as the development of legislative proposals and guidance, promotional activities, developing safety health and chemicals policy, processing FOI requests and representing Irish interests in various EU fora.

In recent years, the HSA, in common with many other State Agencies and Government Departments, has had to contend with resource challenges involving reduced staff numbers. In order to counteract this trend the HSA engaged in a number of “smarter” work practices in order to ensure its message of improving workplace health and safety continues to reach its largest possible audience. These practices include the development of the BeSMART online risk assessment tool, the publishing of online eLearning courses and in the agriculture area, the introduction of a programme of informative Farm Walks. New ways of working have also included the updating of the HSA’s inspection data management system to increase ease and efficiency of data entry through a simplified data entry system and a new smartphone based field inspection data capture system is currently being piloted, again to improve efficiency.

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. As of 1 September, it has carried out 61% of its target number of inspections and investigations for the year.

It has recently also carried out a significant revision of its Workforce Plan aimed at taking account of the impact of trends such as the growth in employment and in particular the extremely strong growth in the high-risk construction sector and the business and jobs opportunities presented by Brexit. Its inspectors are at the core of addressing these issues both through traditional workplace inspections and through a range of policy, promotional and advisory activities.

Research Funding Data

131. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of SMEs that have undertaken applied research in conjunction with a funded agency or institution under the aegis of her Department in each of the past ten years, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39178/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The agencies under the aegis of my Department with responsibility for research funding and who have a specific SME nexus are Science Foundation Ireland and Enterprise Ireland.

Science Foundation Ireland is the national foundation for investment in scientific and engineering research and is the principal agency through which my Department funds both basic and applied research in third level institutions.

Science Foundation Ireland provides funding to researchers in Higher Education Institutes to cover both basic and applied research. Decisions in respect of such funding are the result of competitive international peer review in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths. Collaboration between industry and academia is one of the key mechanisms for transferring the benefits of public investment in research into competitive advantage for Ireland. Science Foundation Ireland therefore actively encourages the researchers it supports to engage in collaborations with industry. It has a number of programmes to support this type of activity including its Spokes Programme to promote new industry-academia collaborations, Investigators Programme underpinning enterprise competitiveness and Research Professorship Programme recruiting world leading scientists with a strong industry background.

In 2008, SFI formally began recording and reporting data on the number of collaborations by Science Foundation Ireland Researchers with SMEs. Any single SME may be involved in a number of collaborations, therefore SFI collected data on the number of collaborations and the number of SMEs. The data as presented below reflects a steady increase in SME engagement since 2008 and early reporting indications for 2017 reflect an ongoing trend in this direction. Since 2008, there have been almost 3,000 SME engagements with SFI research programmes and in 2016, SFI recorded its highest number of collaborations, 674, with 491 SMEs.

SFI SME collaborations since 2008:

Year	No. Collaborations	No. SMEs
2008	126	108
2009	206	165
2010	335	245
2011	424	337
2012	527	428
2013	439	332
2014	561	442
2015	509	437
2016	674	491

Enterprise Ireland, also an agency of my Department is the agency responsible for the development and growth of Irish enterprises in world markets. Enterprise Ireland also provides funding for research to third-level institutions, principally through its Commercialisation Fund; Innovation Partnerships and the Technology Centres.

Enterprise Ireland drives innovation in Irish industry by developing in-company capabilities and by leveraging all external assets, such as the higher education system, the investor com-

munity, the Foreign Direct Investment Multinational base and international funding/expertise to support company innovations.

The funding for Enterprise Ireland's innovation programmes provides direct and indirect research development and innovation supports for indigenous companies, equity funding for new start-ups and support for the commercialisation of State-funded research.

RD&I Fund

The Research, Development & Innovation (RD&I) Fund supports the development of new or substantially improved products, services or processes which will have a competitive advantage in their target market. This will enable companies to increase employment through sustainable and substantially increased sales.

R&D projects involve the resolution of technical challenges in order to develop new products, processes or services.

Business Innovation projects involve the implementation of a new service delivery or production method or a substantive change to the business model of the company.

Innovation Partnerships

Innovation Partnerships offer financial support to companies who engage in collaborative research projects with Irish universities and Institutes of Technology with Enterprise Ireland providing grants of up to 80% towards eligible costs of the research project. The participating company benefits in terms of its growth, the evolution of its strategic research and development and the creation of new knowledge that it can use to generate commercial advantage. The research institute benefits in terms of developing skill sets, intellectual property and publications.

Innovation Vouchers

Vouchers encourage small to medium sized companies and public knowledge providers to work together on specific innovation questions and projects related to the company's needs. The nature of such projects will be such that they transfer knowledge that is new to the company. The company may use the new knowledge to innovate a product, production process or service.

Technology Centres

The Enterprise Ireland/IDA Ireland Technology Centre initiative allows industry groups to set a commercially valuable research agenda which academics in the higher education sector will deliver on. This programme is Ireland's largest initiative to support industry-led research, development and innovation. These Centres focus on identifying new sources of industrial growth and job creation and achieving competitive advantage for industry in Ireland by accessing and leveraging the innovative capacity of the Irish research community. Approximately 200 companies engage with Technology Centres per annum.

Technology Gateways

Enterprise Ireland funds small industry facing "gateways" in Institutes of Technology, aimed at providing technology solutions for companies in a particular sector and, where possible, within a region. The Technology Gateway Programme is an evolution of the Applied Research Enhancement Scheme and was established by Enterprise Ireland to provide Business Development resources to the Institutes of Technology to help them interact with industry on a local, regional and national basis.

The following table shows the reported/recorded figures for the following programmes: significant RD&I Fund approvals, Innovation Partnership approvals to EI clients, Innovation vouchers redeemed, companies engaged with Technology Centres and direct funded Technology Gateway projects.

Programme	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Significant RD&I Fund Approvals	n/a	15	123	86	80	81	107	97	86	78
Innovation Partnerships Approvals	33	34	30	30	33	35	58	42	41	39
Innovation Vouchers Redeemed	n/a	203	437	489	518	518	527	525	530	594
Technology Gateways direct funded projects	n/a	3	3	12	21	11	34	43	100	157

In the case of the Enterprise Ireland Innovation Partnership programme, Technology Centres and Technology Gateways, the number of projects reported does not include clients of IDA Ireland, LEO and the other agencies who also receive support from these schemes.

Research Funding Data

132. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department has conducted an analysis concerning the objectives of the Science Foundation Ireland strategic partnership programme; the level of funding provided on both basic and applied research by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39188/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Science Foundation Ireland Strategic Partnerships Programme was launched in 2013, with a total of 11 awards funded under the programme to date supporting excellent research with strong potential for delivering economic and/or societal impact.

The objectives of the programme are to:

- Support development of areas of economic importance
- Build stronger, more direct relationships with research-based industry
- Transfer technology from academia to industry
- Support enhanced training of researchers in areas of importance to the industrial sector
- Maximise the state investment in research through leveraging of non-exchequer funding, including funding available through Horizon 2020
- Encourage convergence across disciplines
- Develop and utilise national testbed facilities
- Support the attraction and retention of talented researchers
- Build stronger links with other key stakeholders and end-users of research

Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) has not initiated a formal analysis of the programme to date. However, as with all Science Foundation Ireland programmes, the agency monitors and adjusts the programme on an ongoing basis in response to academic, industry, economic and strategic requirements.

All SFI awards, including the SFI Strategic Partnership awards are subject to stringent post award reporting and evaluation processes.

The annual grants budget to Science Foundation Ireland for 2017 is €162.5 million. The agency does not predetermine or “ring fence” specific funding allocation for basic or applied research. Funding decisions are made through international peer review on the basis of research excellence and impact.

In 2013, SFI’s remit extended to funding applied research in addition to its existing remit to fund oriented basic research. This broad remit enables Science Foundation Ireland to support a hugely important range of work from early stage investigations, novel discoveries through to pre-commercial activities.

While Science Foundation Ireland funding does fund applied and industry focused research as per its mandate, it should be noted that over 80% of Science Foundation Ireland’s funding is currently committed to basic (Technology Readiness Levels 1 and 2 as measured on a scale of 1-9) research projects. This indicates that a substantial amount of SFI funding continues to be in support of ‘oriented basic’ research.

Approximately 50% of Science Foundation Ireland funding is given to large SFI Research Centres which partner with industry. These centres conduct “applied and basic combined” research. Approximately 30% of Science Foundation Ireland award holders have at least one industry collaborator. Industry partners work on both basic and applied projects.

While the Strategic Partnership Programme has yet to undergo formal evaluation, the monitoring undertaken by SFI and the stringent post award reporting requirements and evaluation processes are robust processes that validate the economic and social impact of the funding awarded to date.

Action Plan for Jobs

133. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation further to the recently released live register reduction figures, what additional efforts she will make to ensure that the Action Plan for Jobs is working effectively in County Sligo in view of the fact that it is in every other county; if special consideration can be given to County Sligo to assist it; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39198/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The North East/North West Action Plan for Jobs is the key policy response for supporting employment growth in the Border region, with public and private stakeholders actively engaged in delivering a range of innovative and practical actions set out in the Plan. Sectors targeted as part of the plan include traditionally strong sectors for the region like agri-food, manufacturing/engineering and tourism.

The core objective of the plan is to see a further 28,000 at work in the region by 2020 and to reduce the unemployment rate to within 1 percentage point of the State average.

Progress Reports on the implementation of the Regional Action Plans across all regions

show that that good progress has been made in implementing the actions. Published Reports are available on www.regionalapj.ie.

There has been a substantial improvement in the North East / North West region since the commencement of the National Action Plan for Jobs in 2012, with an additional 20,900 in employment in Q1 2017 compared to Q1 2012. There are now almost 5,000 more people in work in the region since the launch of the Regional Action Plan initiative in 2015.

Moreover, the unemployment rate in the region has fallen from 10.2% in quarter 1 of 2015 to 7.5% in quarter 1 of this year, compared to the then national rate of 6.7%.

The latest CSO figures show that there were 3,747 people on the Live Register in County Sligo in August 2017. This figure represents a decrease of 15.5%, or 688 individuals, over the previous 12 months.

This reduction is to be welcomed and demonstrates that while there are still challenges to surmount in bringing down this figure further, the overall trend for County Sligo is one of steady improvement.

The enterprise agencies in particular are working very hard towards the ambitious targets set out in the Regional Action Plan.

There were 23 multinational companies employing over 2,290 people in county Sligo in 2016.

IDA Ireland continues to actively market Sligo, where the agency has eight hectares of available lands on the Finisklin Business & Technology Park and a 31 hectares green-field land bank in Oakfield which will be accessed by Western Distributor Road. I understand that work on the Western Distributor Road will commence by the end of 2017.

Enterprise Ireland (EI) supported companies employed 1,546 people in 2016 in Sligo. EI provided €2 million in payment to companies located in Sligo over the period 2014 – 2016. In addition, Enterprise Ireland and local development groups funded the establishment of four Community Enterprise Centres in Sligo.

EI's recent strategy for the period 2017-2020 is Brexit-focused and has a number of ambitious targets, namely, the creation of 60,000 new jobs by 2020 and the growth of exports by €5bn to €26bn per annum. The EI office in Sligo is assisting in the implementation of this strategy with its 70 clients and was involved in an "Enterprise Start" event that took place in Sligo last February to encourage and support new start up business ideas.

The Sligo Local Enterprise Office (LEO) is fully engaged in supporting the micro-enterprise and small business sectors in the county to create and sustain jobs. In 2016, under the Competitive LEO fund, LEO Sligo was partner on two successful projects to support small business in Sligo.

To support regional enterprise development, additional funding of up to €60m is being rolled out by Enterprise Ireland over the next 4 years to support the development and implementation of collaborative and innovative projects that can sustain and add to employment at a national, regional and county level.

I am very conscious of the challenges as a result of Brexit faced by companies operating in close proximity to the Border, many of which trade freely on both sides of the Border.

Since the UK referendum, the State agencies under my remit have been active in supporting

companies in assessing and addressing their exposure to Brexit.

EI's current "Prepare for Brexit" campaign includes a Brexit scoreboard available to all companies to self-assess their preparedness for Brexit and generates a report suggesting appropriate responses.

For exporting companies, new resources were secured, including extra staffing, for EI and the LEOs in Budget 2017 to assist businesses to maintain and grow export markets.

Based on significant analysis and stakeholder consultation, my Department is currently working on further measures targeted at the needs of companies in the wider economy around working capital and business development.

Research Funding Data

134. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of doctoral students and post-doctoral researchers funded by the agencies under her aegis in each of the past ten years, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39202/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Innovation 2020, Ireland's 5-year strategy for research and development, science and technology sets out the roadmap for continuing progress towards the goal of making Ireland a Global Innovation Leader, driving a strong sustainable economy and a better society. One of the strategy's objectives is to ensure that education supports and helps to drive innovation. This strategy has its goals to increase annual research masters and PhD enrolments and to support the full continuum of talent development from primary level through to Postdoctoral research. This is building on the valuable work commenced and undertaken by agencies under my Department's remit prior to the launch of the strategy.

Science Foundation Ireland:

Science Foundation Ireland funding ensures that Ireland is producing the highly skilled talent and skills that are critical to the economy's development and Ireland's continued performance in global rankings in scientific research excellence. There are currently a total of 4,239 people working on Science Foundation Ireland supported research projects. Of these, 1,441 are postgraduate students. 27% of PhD departures from Science Foundation Ireland funded teams went to industry as a first destination in 2016 and 32% of postdocs went to industry as first destination in the same period.

The table presents the number of PhD students and post-doctoral researchers attributed to active Science Foundation Ireland awards.

Science Foundation Ireland Doctoral and Post-Doctoral numbers

	PhDs	Post-Doctoral Researchers
2008	1153	686
2009	1344	846
2010	1251	781
2011	1284	728
2012	1165	708
2013	955	584

	PhDs	Post-Doctoral Researchers
2014	971	628
2015	1159	830
2016	1316	982

PRTLTI:

The Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLTI) was launched in 1998. The programme provides funding for third-level research infrastructure, national shared facilities, and structured PhD programmes. The PRTLTI transferred to my Department in 2010 from the Department of Education and Skills. The Higher Education Authority continues to administer the programme on behalf of my Department.

There have been 5 Cycles of the PRTLTI to date with investment totalling €1.2 billion of combined Exchequer and private investment. PRTLTI Cycle 5 was launched in July 2010 with total awards of €359m announced across 36 distinct projects involving capital infrastructure and structured PhD/Emergent Technologies programmes.

The planning and design of a successor to Cycle 5 of PRTLTI is an action in Innovation 2020 and is being progressed by my Department working closely with the Department of Education and Skills. My Department has included a proposal to commence funding for a successor to Cycle 5 of the PRTLTI in its submission to the Mid-term Review of the Capital Plan. There will be more clarity on a successor to Cycle 5 when this review is concluded, and the funding envelope for this and other projects is finalised.

PRTLTI Doctoral and Post-Doctoral numbers funded 2007 - 2017

	PhDs	Post-Doctoral Researchers
Cycle 4	277	138
Cycle 5	336	72

The number of PhDs and post-doctoral researchers has steadily increased in recent years and it is my firm intention to ensure that this trend is given increased momentum and importance in the years ahead through the implementation of specific actions in Innovation 2020 and funding for specific SFI programmes aimed at increasing the numbers of PhD students and post-doctoral researchers.

Research Funding Data

135. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation what State agencies which are involved in research funding; the annual budget for research funding for each; the criteria applied to applications under each agency and to different streams within each agency in which they exist, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39302/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The agencies under the aegis of my Department with responsibility for research funding are Science Foundation Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland. In addition, the Higher Education Authority administers the Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions on behalf of the Department.

Science Foundation Ireland:

The annual grants budget to Science Foundation Ireland for 2017 is €162.5 million.

Science Foundation Ireland funds across the career spectrum from early-stage researchers to mid-stage career researchers to emerging research stars and up to established highly-esteemed research leaders, through individual and collaborative awards. Science Foundation Ireland makes funding decisions based on rigorous international peer review processes. This process ensures that the agency is not only funding research that is excellent at an Irish level but that it is world leading as reviewed and agreed by international field specific leaders.

Science Foundation Ireland currently operates approximately 25 funding schemes, offering a balanced portfolio of programmes, many involving national and international collaborations with both small and large companies, charities, international funders as well as national funders such as Teagasc, the Marine Institute, Environmental Protection Agency, Health Research Board, etc. Each of the schemes has varying review and eligibility criteria attached to them based on the objective, award level and complexity. There are a number of core applicant eligibility criteria applied to the funding programmes. These are listed below by programme.

Each programme has a call document which outlines the eligibility criteria for each programme. All programme calls may be found at <http://www.sfi.ie/funding/funding-calls/>.

Enterprise Ireland:

Enterprise Ireland drives innovation in Irish industry by developing in-company capabilities and by leveraging all external assets, such as the higher education system, the investor community, the Foreign Direct Investment Multinational base and international funding/expertise to support company innovations.

The funding for Enterprise Ireland's innovation programmes provides direct and indirect research development and innovation supports for indigenous companies, equity funding for new start-ups and support for the commercialisation of State funded research. In 2017 the annual budget for research funding was approximately €85m.

Typically in the application process Enterprise Ireland requirements include some of the following criteria. However, it differs depending on the programme:

- Applicants must show evidence of a commercial market for the proposed product or service.
- Applicants must prove that they will develop a business that is built upon on a strong foundation of innovation and/or technology.
- Companies who apply must be either Irish based manufacturing companies or Irish based internationally-traded services companies that can show adequate cash resources to implement the proposed project.

For specific programme application and eligibility criteria please follow the links in the table.

Programme	2017 Budget €	Link for application details
Technology Gateways	5,375,000	https://enterprise-ireland.com/en/Research-Innovation/Companies/Collaborate-with-companies-research-institutes/Technology-Gateway-Programme.html

Programme	2017 Budget €	Link for application details
Innovation Partnerships	9,230,000	https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/Funding-Supports/Researcher/Funding-to-Collaborate-with-Industry-in-Ireland/Innovation-Partnerships.shortcut.html
Technology Centres	22,330,000	https://enterprise-ireland.com/en/research-innovation/companies/collaborate-with-companies-research-institutes/technology-centres.html
International Collaboration	4,540,000	https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/Researchers/EU-Programmes-and-Networks/Horizon-2020.html
Innovation Vouchers	3,945,000	https://enterprise-ireland.com/en/Research-Innovation/Companies/Collaborate-with-companies-research-institutes/Innovation-Voucher.shortcut.html
Commercialisation Fund	17,040,000	https://enterprise-ireland.com/en/funding-supports/Researcher/Funding-to-Commercialise-Research/Commercialisation-Fund.html
RD&I Fund	23,310,000	https://enterprise-ireland.com/en/funding-supports/Company/Establish-SME-Funding/R-D-Fund-Large-Projects-.html
	85,770,000	

The budget allocation for R&I in Enterprise Ireland is wider than that for the direct funding of research. This budget funds other initiatives to support the R&I ecosystem across Ireland, such as, the New Frontiers Entrepreneur Development Programme and Campus Incubation Programme.

IDA:

IDA Ireland grants paid for RD&I forms part of the overall annual Agency Grant Payment Budget.

As part of IDA Ireland's current strategy (2015- 2019), IDA Ireland has committed to winning a cumulative €3bn in new RD&I Investment projects including in-house and collaborative RD&I projects with companies and universities by 2019. The table outlines results achieved in 2015 and 2016.

IDA R&D	2015	2016
No of Research, Development & Innovation Projects won	47	54
Investment in Research, Development & Innovation Projects	€1.23bn	€1.12bn

IDA R&D	2015	2016
Total R&D in-house Expenditure	€1.5bn (Data refers to 2014)	€1.5bn (Data refers to 2015)

IDA approves Research Development & Innovation Grants and Feasibility Study Grants to its portfolio of clients under the following guidelines:

Research Development & Innovation:

Companies can avail of financial incentives to carry out in-house R&D projects and collaborative projects with third-level institutes and industrial partners. There is also a 25% tax credit available for companies engaging in R&D.

R&D Funding

Financial supports for small and large-scale product, process or service R&D projects and stimulation grants to assist companies not involved in R&D activities to investigate the potential for an R&D project.

PRTLTI:

The Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions (PRTLTI) which is managed by the Higher Education Authority on behalf of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, supports the provision of top-class research infrastructure (buildings, laboratories and cutting edge equipment) as well as human capital development, through structured PhD/emergent technology programmes across Ireland's Higher Education Institutes (HEIs).

In 2017 the annual allocation to PRTLTI was €14.4m. My Department is using the PRTLTI allocation to meet remaining liabilities from Cycle 5 of PRTLTI. Funding allocated to PRTLTI has been and will continue to be used to pay off some of the remaining Exchequer commitments. HEIs have built new facilities, or developed new structured PhD programmes. They submit claims to recoup the State's committed amount on the particular project subsequently to the Higher Education Authority which administers the PRTLTI on behalf of DJEI.

Workplace Safety

136. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the investigations undertaken and disciplinary measures imposed by the HAS against construction companies where those companies have been reported to be in breach of CSCS regulations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39393/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Deputy has clarified that the information requested relates to the years 2014 to present.

In responding to the Deputy's question the Health and Safety Authority will need to review a large number of construction-related complaint cases referred to the Authority to determine the number of complaints directly relating to the Construction Skills Certification Scheme. It is not possible to obtain the information in the time available, therefore I have asked the Health and Safety Authority to provide me with the information requested which I communicate to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

Industrial Relations

137. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her attention has been drawn to the fact that the Labour Court recommendation not to include travel time in the upcoming construction SEO amounts to a 11% pay cut for persons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39394/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): The Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act of 2015 provides for a new statutory framework – Sectoral Employment Orders - for establishing minimum rates of remuneration and other terms and conditions of employment for a specified type, class or group of workers. This is in effect a framework to replace the former sectoral Registered Employment Agreement (REA) system which was found to be unconstitutional in 2013 in McGowan - v – The Labour Court.

The new framework sets down a mechanism whereby at the request, separately or jointly from organisations substantially representative of employers and/or of workers, the Labour Court can initiate a review of the pay and pension and sick pay entitlements of workers in a particular sector and, if it deems it appropriate, make a recommendation to myself as Minister on the matter. If I am satisfied that the process provided for in the 2015 Act has been complied with by the Labour Court, I can then make the Order. Where such an order is made it is known as a Sectoral Employment Order (SEO), will be binding across the sector to which it relates, and will be enforceable by the Workplace Relations Commission.

In November 2016, the Construction Industry Federation made an application to the Labour Court to review the pay, pension and sick pay entitlements of craftsmen, construction operatives and apprentices in the Construction Sector. The Labour Court conducted its review, which included a public consultation and a hearing of interested parties, and submitted its recommendation to me on July 13th. Having examined the recommendation and being satisfied that the Court complied with the provisions of the 2015 Act, I accepted its recommendation. A draft Order to give effect in law to the recommendation was laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas on 22nd August. The order cannot be made until approval of both Houses is obtained and I intend seeking that approval at the earliest opportunity when the Houses reconvene after the summer recess.

Under the legislation it is the Labour Court that is mandated to determine the specific elements of the recommendation based on oral and written submissions to the Court. I have no function in this regard.

Work Permits Data

138. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation for the number of work permits issued to Israeli citizens in each of years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017. [39543/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The table shows the number of employment permits issued to Israeli nationals since 2011. The figures for 2017 represent employment permits issued to end of August. These statistics and others relating to the employment permits system may be accessed via my Department's website at: <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Workplace-and-Skills/Employment-Permits/Statistics/>.

	New	Renewal	Total
2017	36	60	96

	New	Renewal	Total
2016	156	43	199
2015	213	15	228
2014	264	12	276
2013	28	17	45
2012	35	10	45
2011	32	7	39

Consumer Protection

139. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if EU regulations or national legislation is in place which obliges electrical retailers to stock spare parts for products they are selling; the timeframe for setting out the length of time they must stock the parts after the product is no longer being sold or goes out of production; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39600/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Section 12(1) of the Sale of Goods and Supply of Services Act 1980 provides that in a contract for the sale of goods there is an implied warranty that spare parts and an adequate aftersale service will be made available by the seller in such circumstances as are stated in an offer, description or advertisement by the seller on behalf of the manufacturer or on his own behalf and for such period as is so stated or, if no period is so stated, for a reasonable period. The provision to make spare parts available for a specified or a reasonable period applies accordingly only where the seller of the goods has stated that he or she will do so in an offer, description or advertisement. Section 12(2) provides that the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation may, after consultation with interested parties, define by order in relation to any class of goods described in the order what shall be a reasonable period for the purpose of section 12(1). No such order has been made to date.

There is no European Union legislation requiring electrical or other retailers to stock spare parts for a product that they are selling. The European Union (Consumer Information, Cancellation and Other Rights) Regulations 2013 which give effect to Directive 2011/83/EU on Consumer Rights require traders, where applicable, to provide information to the consumer on the existence and conditions of after-sales services and, additionally in the case of distance and off-premises contracts, after-sale customer assistance, before the consumer is bound by the contract. The Consumer Protection Act 2007 which gives effect to Directive 2005/29/EC on Unfair Commercial Practices prohibits at section 43 the provision of false or misleading information about the after-supply customer assistance available to consumers and the need for any part, replacement, servicing or repair in relation to the product if that information would be likely to cause the average consumer to make a purchasing or other transactional decision that he or she would not otherwise make.

Question No. 140 answered with Question No. 125.

Construction Sector Strategy

141. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to give legal effect to the proposed sectoral employment order for the construction sector; if the legal obligation to comply with the order in terms of rates of pay and so on only relates to the employer concerned; if there will be an obligation on the end user of

the employee's services in which for example an agency is the employer but a building contractor is the end user of the employee's services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39674/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): The Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act of 2015 provides for a new statutory framework – Sectoral Employment Orders - for establishing minimum rates of remuneration and other terms and conditions of employment for a specified type, class or group of workers. This is in effect a framework to replace the former sectoral Registered Employment Agreement (REA) system which was found to be unconstitutional in 2013 in *McGowan - v - The Labour Court*.

The new framework sets down a mechanism whereby at the request, separately or jointly from organisations substantially representative of employers and/or of workers, the Labour Court can initiate a review of the pay and pension and sick pay entitlements of workers in a particular sector and, if it deems it appropriate, make a recommendation to myself as Minister on the matter. If I am satisfied that the process provided for in the 2015 Act has been complied with by the Labour Court, I can then make the order. Where such an order is made it is known as a Sectoral Employment Order (SEO), will be binding across the sector to which it relates, and will be enforceable by the Workplace Relations Commission. The terms of the SEO will also relate to temporary agency workers by virtue of Section 6 of the Protection of Employees (Temporary Agency Work) Act 2012.

In November 2016, the Construction Industry Federation made an application to the Labour Court to review the pay, pension and sick pay entitlements of craftsmen, construction operatives and apprentices in the Construction Sector. The Labour Court conducted its review, which included a public consultation and a hearing of interested parties, and submitted its recommendation to me on July 13th. Having examined the recommendation and being satisfied that the Court complied with the provisions of the 2015 Act, I accepted its recommendation. A draft order to give effect in law to the recommendation was laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas on 22nd August. The order cannot be made until approval of both Houses is obtained and I intend seeking that approval at the earliest opportunity when the Houses reconvene after the summer recess.

Construction Sector Strategy

142. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when the sectoral employment order for the construction sector will be brought before Dáil Éireann and implemented for all construction workers. [39814/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): The Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act of 2015 provides for a new statutory framework – Sectoral Employment Orders - for establishing minimum rates of remuneration and other terms and conditions of employment for a specified type, class or group of workers. This is in effect a framework to replace the former sectoral Registered Employment Agreement (REA) system which was found to be unconstitutional in 2013 in *McGowan - v - The Labour Court*.

The new framework sets down a mechanism whereby at the request, separately or jointly from organisations substantially representative of employers and/or of workers, the Labour Court can initiate a review of the pay and pension and sick pay entitlements of workers in a particular sector and, if it deems it appropriate, make a recommendation to myself as Minister

on the matter. If I am satisfied that the process provided for in the 2015 Act has been complied with by the Labour Court, I can then make the Order. Where such an order is made it is known as a Sectoral Employment Order (SEO), will be binding across the sector to which it relates, and will be enforceable by the Workplace Relations Commission.

In November 2016, the Construction Industry Federation made an application to the Labour Court to review the pay, pension and sick pay entitlements of craftsmen, construction operatives and apprentices in the Construction Sector. The Labour Court conducted its Review, which included a public consultation and a hearing of interested parties, and submitted its recommendation to me on July 13th. Having examined the Recommendation and being satisfied that the Court complied with the provisions of the 2015 Act, I accepted its recommendation. A draft Order to give effect in law to the recommendation was laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas on 22nd August. The Order cannot be made until approval of both Houses is obtained and I intend seeking that approval at the earliest opportunity when the Houses reconvene after the summer recess.

Brexit Issues

143. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of Be Prepared grants granted to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39870/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Brexit presents the most significant economic challenge of the past 50 years and long-term, structural and disruptive change will emerge. Following the UK's vote to leave the EU, the need to accelerate and implement competitiveness, innovation and market diversification strategies at a national and company level cannot be underestimated. This is at the crux of Enterprise Ireland's 2017-2020 Build Scale and Expand Reach strategy and its new Eurozone Strategy to assist Irish exporters increase exports in eurozone countries by 50% by 2020.

The devaluation and volatility of sterling, and the uncertainty that has unfolded in the business environment since the UK vote to leave the EU cannot be underestimated. At the same time, Enterprise Ireland clients are challenged to prepare to operate in a yet unknown trading environment post Brexit – they must prepare for a hard Brexit. Enterprise Ireland's clients are actively utilising the agency's financial and non-financial supports to meet the innovation, competitiveness and market diversification challenges of Brexit as part of their strategic growth plans.

In March 2017, Enterprise Ireland launched a '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. 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. To date approximately 1,500 companies have utilised the Brexit SME Scorecard.

Enterprise Ireland's Be Prepared grant provides client companies with the cost of preparing a plan to mitigate risks and optimise opportunities arising from Brexit. This grant support, of up to €5,000, can be used to help cover consultancy, travel and out of pocket expenses associated with researching the direction of their Brexit action plan. To date in excess of 40 companies have received approval for support under this initiative and a strong pipeline of companies have applications undergoing review for approval.

Brexit Issues

144. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she will report on the development of a Brexit working capital guarantee scheme. [39871/17]

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.

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 on scoping out the need for a longer term Business Development Loan Scheme which would assist firms in investing for a post-Brexit environment.

The Working Capital scheme would benefit those SMEs that are particularly affected by issues related to Brexit. Such SME's may need extra liquidity to cope with working capital challenges brought about by Brexit. The scheme would be offered by the SBCI through on-lenders.

Development of these proposed responses is subject to resources being agreed as part of the annual budgetary process.

Foreign Direct Investment

145. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which his Department is co-ordinating or overseeing Ireland's response to possible or pending changes to the US trade and tax policy as outlined in the national risk assessment report. [39101/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The outline of the US tax reform proposal is expected to be released at the end of September. It is expected that the proposal will include a reduction in the US corporate tax rate. It remains to be seen whether any reduction in the US corporate tax rate would be permanent or temporary in nature.

Agreement between the House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate and President Trump will be needed before any changes can be introduced.

The exact implications of US tax reform for Ireland, and the rest of the world, will depend on the exact nature of any changes which are ultimately agreed.

The Department of Finance, and our Embassy in the US, are closely tracking the debate in the US and we continue to engage with business and others to fully understand the potential impacts of any US reform.

Global business, from the US or elsewhere, will always want to have operations in the EU, and Ireland will remain very competitive and attractive as an EU location to invest in and do business from.

Ireland's corporation tax regime and 12.5% corporation tax rate will continue to be competitive while also offering long-term certainty to international business. As always, we will remain alert and responsive to any changes in the US or global tax environment.

Tax Credits

146. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding a single person's child carer credit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39145/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The One-Parent Family Tax Credit (OPFTC) was replaced by the Single Person Child Carer Credit (SPCCC) from 1 January 2014. The restructured credit is of the same value as the OPFTC, €1,650 per annum, and also includes the same entitlement to the additional €4,000 extended standard rate band, which increases to €37,800 per annum the point of entry to the higher rate of income tax.

The SPCCC (which is provided for under Section 462B of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997) is available to a single person who is the parent of a child or has custody of, and maintains, a child who is living with that person. The credit is granted in the first instance to the primary claimant, who is the person with whom the child resides for the whole or greater part of the year, normally 183 or more days per year. This could be either the mother or the father, or in some cases another carer such as a grandparent. In cases where there is an exact 50:50 split between parents, the credit is allocated to the parent in receipt of the child benefit payment from the Department of Social Protection.

The primary claimant may, if he or she wishes, relinquish the credit in favour of a qualifying secondary claimant who has the child residing with him or her for not less than 100 days in the year. Where a primary claimant relinquishes his or her entitlement to the credit, the relinquishment remains in place until the primary claimant withdraws it, i.e. the secondary claimant can continue to claim the credit, provided he or she continues to satisfy the conditions for claiming the credit, until the relinquishment of the credit is withdrawn by the primary claimant.

If a parent believes he or she qualifies as the primary claimant in respect of a qualifying child but the credit has been granted to another individual, he or she should provide a completed Form SPCC1 to Revenue together with any relevant evidence in support of his/her claim that the child resides with him/her for the whole or greater part of the year. The primary claimant will be decided by Revenue on the basis of the facts in each case. The Form SPCC1 is available on Revenue's website at www.revenue.ie/en/personal-tax-credits-reliefs-and-exemptions/documents/spcc1.pdf.

The possible automatic transfer of the credit has been considered in cases where a primary carer refuses to relinquish it. However, there are many reasons why this would not be feasible, including logistical, data protection and constitutional concerns. These issues are outlined in detail in the review of the SPCCC conducted by my Department in 2015 contained in the Report on Tax Expenditures, available online at: http://budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2016/Documents/Tax_Expenditures_Report_pub.pdf.

In particular this review identified that a partial or automatic transfer of the credit between spouses would still require the consent and co-operation of the primary carer, as it would require a declaration of income to be filed in order to confirm that the credit was not being fully utilised. It was therefore determined that any system of automatic transfer would provide limited additional benefit over the current provisions for transfer of the credit to a secondary claimant. I am satisfied that the SPCCC is targeting limited resources to where they are most needed.

If the Deputy has specific details regarding a claim to entitlement to the Single Person Child Carer Tax Credit, he can provide these to my officials and I will have the matter examined by Revenue.

Corporation Tax

147. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if he has informed European Commission President Juncker that he will oppose the proposal to drop the unanimity requirement in relation to the proposed common consolidated corporate tax base; and if he will indicate to him that taxation matters should remain under the competence of each member state. [39859/17]

185. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the recent comments made by President Juncker in his state of the union address (details supplied); the implications this may have for the State; the actions he will take to prevent changes to the corporation tax rate here in view of the commitment made following the second Lisbon treaty and the agreed protocols on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39745/17]

192. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if he has indicated at the European Council of Finance Ministers that he will oppose the proposal to drop the unanimity requirement in relation to the proposed common consolidated corporate tax base; if he will further indicate that taxation matters should remain under the competence of each member state; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39856/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 147, 185 and 192 together.

I note the comment made by President Juncker on the requirement of unanimity. There is no official proposal currently for a change on the way tax policy decisions are taken in the EU.

Under the EU Treaties, for the European Council to move a policy area such as taxation from unanimity to qualified majority voting it would require a unanimous decision to do so. The support of the European Parliament would also be required. The Irish Government would not favour any change to existing EU voting rights on corporation tax.

Regarding the CCTB, Member States are discussing and debating the various aspects of the proposal in the relevant tax working parties. Ireland will engage constructively with the proposal while critically analysing whether it is in line with Ireland's long-term interests. Tax remains a matter of Member State competence and unanimity is required before any proposals can be agreed.

Sale of State Assets

148. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the proposal by the Congress of Trade Unions that the proceeds from the sale of shares in a bank (details supplied) should go towards solving the State's housing and homelessness emergency by diverting these funds into a new social housing programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39048/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As I have stated previously, the sale of shares in AIB held by the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund does not result in a beneficial impact to the General Government Balance under the European System of Accounts 2010. This is due to the fact that it is classified as a 'financial transaction' whereby it is essentially the exchange of one form of asset (shares, equities, loans) for another kind (cash). Consequently the sale of any shareholding in AIB does not count as general government revenue. Thus there is no increased capacity to spend on capital projects as a result of the sale of shares in AIB without

affecting the general government balance and compliance with the fiscal rules.

While not improving the deficit, the cash proceeds arising from the sale of AIB shares, which have been transferred to the Exchequer, reduce the Exchequer borrowing requirement and result in lower general government net debt initially and gross debt in time. A lower level of debt is not only beneficial in terms of the fiscal sustainability of the State but will also result in reduced interest payments in future years. The strategy of reducing the national debt is consistent with the Government's policy of repaying the borrowing previously undertaken to finance the recapitalisation of the banking sector during the financial crisis. As previously stated, it is the Government's position that the proceeds from the sale of the State's shareholdings in Irish banks, including AIB, will be used to reduce the outstanding level of public debt.

I have previously acknowledged the need for increased public investment. The current Capital Plan sets a baseline from which this Government intends to increase investment in critical infrastructure, and in areas such as housing and health, as the Deputy has identified into the future. As outlined in the 2017 Estimates, gross voted capital expenditure will increase to €4.5 billion in 2017. This represents an increase of €325 million in comparison to the 2016 outturn. Taking account of the recent decision to increase capital expenditure by €500 million in each of 2019, 2020 and 2021 by lowering the contribution to the Rainy Day Fund, it is envisaged that Gross Voted Capital Expenditure will reach just under €7.8 billion, an increase of over 115 per cent in comparison to its level in 2014.

Furthermore, my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, earlier this month released his Department's review of 'Rebuilding Ireland' alongside a number of newly announced measures specifically designed to tackle the current issues faced around housing and homelessness in Ireland.

Banks Recapitalisation

149. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of moneys used to recapitalise Irish banks specifically for the purpose of dealing with owner-occupier and buy-to-let mortgage debt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39107/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In early 2011, as part of the agreement with the External Partners, the Central Bank commissioned a detailed evaluation of the possible loan losses that would be incurred by banks in a severe stress scenario. All the loan books were examined, including the residential mortgage books in Ireland and the UK. The results of this work were key inputs into the capital requirements identified in PCAR 2011, which totaled €24bn. Total losses modeled under the stress scenario on Irish mortgages were €9bn. This comprised €2bn at Bank of Ireland, €4.4bn at AIB/EBS and €2.6bn at Permanent TSB.

A host of other inputs including forecasts for profits and bank balance sheets contributed to the capital requirement set for each institution. As such it is not possible to break down the capital requirement determined for each institution into individual business lines.

Property Tax Administration

150. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the studies his Department has undertaken in respect of the changes in residential property values and the re-examination of property taxation in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39158/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Dr Don Thornhill was engaged by my predecessor in 2015 to consider the operation of the LPT, and in particular, any impacts on LPT liabilities due to property price developments. The terms of reference for the review required that it also have regard to the overall yield from LPT and its contribution to total tax revenue on an ongoing basis and the desirability of achieving relative stability, both over the short and longer terms, in LPT payments of liable persons. Dr Thornhill's review was informed by the outcomes of a public consultation which received 51 written submissions.

In a contribution to the review, the Economics Division of the Department of Finance prepared estimates of the potential implications for taxpayer liabilities of price developments as a result of price increases since May 2013. This analysis indicated a large variation across the country in possible changes to tax liabilities and estimated that

- 48% of properties would remain in their original band and thus not generate any increase in tax liability,
- 35% of properties would have moved by one band,
- 10% of properties would have moved by two bands,
- The remainder (6%) would have moved by between three and six valuation bands

This illustrated the hypothetical situation that if a revaluation occurred in 2015 there would be significant increases in tax liabilities for some taxpayers, with the bigger band jumps occurring for properties valued in the higher valuation bands in May 2013. The analysis also indicated a wide degree of regional variation in band changes with the largest band increases, and as a consequence tax liability increases under current legislation, mainly occurring in the Dublin area.

Dr Thornhill's review report was published on Budget Day 2015. 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 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 other recommendations in Dr Thornhill's report, involving LPT relief for properties affected by pyrite and relief for properties occupied by persons with disabilities.

I have consistently stated that my Department will consider issues relating to the implementation of other recommendations in the Thornhill Report in due course in line with the 2019 timeline. I can assure the Deputy that this work will be done in good time and that the Government will make its position clear so that households will know well advance what its plans are for LPT. In that regard I consider it very important that the principle that formed a central part of the terms of reference for the 2015 review of LPT i.e., achieving relative stability in LPT payments of liable persons both over the short and longer terms, will inform our consideration of this matter.

Motor Insurance Costs

151. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance the measures he is taking to help persons who are experiencing high motor insurance premiums; his views on whether these measures are seeing positive results; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39180/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, the problem of rising motor insurance premiums was the main impetus for the establishment of the Cost of Insurance Working Group in July 2016. Its report titled the 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 time-frames, 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 this deadline. Overall, all but one of the 27 action points due in the first two quarters of the year have been completed. 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 12-18 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.

In relation to the recommended measures yielding positive results, 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. However, I am hopeful that this greater stability in pricing will be maintained with the result that premiums should continue to fall from the very high level of last year.

State Savings Schemes

152. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if he has given consideration to establishing special savings schemes in State financial institutions and credit unions whereby older persons would be encouraged to invest in funds which might be used exclusively for affordable mortgages for younger persons as suggested by many senior persons. [39182/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It is the responsibility of credit institutions (including those in which as Minister for Finance I have a shareholding interest) and other commercial lenders to raise the funds required for their lending operations, including the provision of residential mortgage loans. Deposits continue to be the most important source of funding for the provision of mortgage and other loans by commercial and non-government lending entities and these entities have to compete in the market for that finance.

Regarding credit unions, they can, subject to Central Bank regulatory provisions, provide

mortgages to members and some do. However, credit unions are currently under-lent and are looking at ways to grow their loan book rather than savings.

In terms of raising debt finance to fund the provision of public services, including the provision of local authority residential mortgages, such finance is raised by the NTMA and other relevant bodies and the State is currently in a position to raise debt finance at very competitive interest rates. There are, therefore, no plans at present to introduce a hypothecated savings scheme specifically to finance the provision of mortgage loans.

Public Sector Pensions

153. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Finance if public sector pension contributions are included in the calculation of item three in table three of the tax expenditure review headed “employees contribution to approved superannuation schemes”; if item two in table three entitled “exemption of employers contributions from employee BIK” encompasses the exemption from employee benefit-in-kind from pension accruals granted by the public employer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39262/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I understand that the Deputy has clarified that his question relates to Table 1 of Section 3 of the Report on Tax Expenditures 2016.

I am advised by Revenue that regarding the first item, the employee contributions to approved superannuation schemes does include contributions by employees in the public sector, though this contribution does not include amounts paid in relation to the PRD.

Regarding the second item, employers’ contributions to approved superannuation schemes excludes public sector employers as the State does not pay contributions to an employee superannuation scheme in the way that it is carried out in the private sector. So, it follows that as the employers contributions are nil then the cost of exemption of the employers contributions from BIK is also nil. Public sector employers do not fill this section out for public sector employees.

Brexit Issues

154. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to implement measures to protect local manufacturers in view of the adverse effects of Brexit on the economy (details supplied). [39269/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Since the referendum in the UK in June 2016, the euro-sterling bilateral exchange rate has appreciated significantly. I am conscious of the challenges which this is posing for the exporting sectors of the economy, especially those in the more traditional sectors of manufacturing.

With regard to the specific concerns raised by the Deputy, the Irish Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) system has a number of policy objectives. Firstly, VRT is an important source of revenue for the State. In addition, 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.

I wish to assure the Deputy that the Government is fully cognisant of the challenges which Brexit presents and the need for policy actions. As we cannot control the international environment or exchange rate developments, it is important that we continue to focus on the factors which we can control, in order to enhance our competitiveness and boost our productivity. Ensuring a sustainable path for the public finances is also of fundamental importance.

Greater market diversification must be part of the policy response, so that dependence and exposure to the UK market is reduced. As part of the Government's trade strategy, Ireland Connected, a number of measures have been set out to specifically address 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.

Motor Insurance Regulation

155. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the status of resolving the outstanding claims associated with a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39279/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Setanta Insurance was placed into liquidation by the Malta Financial Services Authority on 30 April 2014. Setanta Insurance was a Maltese incorporated company and therefore, the Setanta liquidation is being carried out under Maltese law.

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

As the judgment has been delivered, the process of making payments in accordance with the provisions of the Insurance Act, 1964, as amended, has commenced. Payments can only be made out of the ICF, with the approval of the High Court and only if it appears to the High Court that it is unlikely that the claim can be met otherwise than from the ICF. If satisfied, the High Court can order payments out of the ICF up to 65% (or €825,000, whichever is the lesser) due to relevant claimants.

In this regard, an Order was granted in the High Court on Monday 24 July 2017 in relation to 324 claims which were subsequently paid by the Office of the Accountant of the Courts of Justice. The Liquidator has informed the Department that, as of 31 August 2017, there are

1,576 active claims, of which 573 claimants have been paid compensation from the ICF subject to the 65%€825,000 limits. The Liquidator is currently working on the next batch of claims to be included in the next application to the High Court scheduled to be made in February 2018 in accordance with the legislation.

Over and above the 65% ICF payment, it is expected that a proportion of the balance of money due to third party claimants will be met from the proceeds of the distribution of Setanta's assets on completion of the liquidation process. However, it is not possible to say definitively at this stage what proportion of the claims this will amount to. In this regard, a preliminary assessment was carried out by Towers Watson in 2014 who indicated that the Liquidator would not be in a position to meet more than 30% of claims out of the assets of the liquidation. The Liquidator has subsequently informed the Department that as the Supreme Court has now made its judgment, a new actuarial report is being commissioned. This is expected to be completed in Q4 2017.

Tax Code

156. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the revenue that would be raised if a cap was introduced for companies to allow for a maximum write off of depreciation against income of percentages (details supplied) per annum regarding capital allowances on intellectual property. [39306/17]

157. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the revenue that would be raised if the 2014 rules of taxation for capital allowance of intellectual property were reinstated with regard to capital allowances on intellectual property. [39307/17]

174. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue that would be raised if a cap was introduced for companies to allow for a maximum write off of annual depreciation of intangible assets of percentages (details supplied) of annual income. [39521/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 156, 157 and 174 together.

The Review of Ireland's Corporation Tax Code, which was undertaken by an independent expert, Mr. Seamus Coffey, was published on Tuesday, 12 September 2017. In the Review, Mr. Coffey makes a number of recommendations in respect of Ireland's corporation tax code, including a recommendation that a cap of 80% should apply to the amount of capital allowances for intangible assets, and any related interest expense, that may be deducted from income arising from intangible assets in an accounting period. The use of such capital allowances and related interest expenses are already ring-fenced under current legislation - they can only be offset against relevant income arising from the intangible assets. However, Mr. Coffey has recommended that a cap should also apply, in line with the treatment that applied prior to 2015, with the objective of ensuring some smoothing of corporation tax revenues over time.

Of note, the re-introduction of a cap would affect the timing of relief in the form of capital allowances and related interest expenses for intangible assets but would not affect the overall quantum of relief. This is because any amounts restricted in one accounting period as a result of a cap would be available for carry forward and utilisation in a subsequent accounting period, subject to the application of the cap in that period.

As the Deputy will be aware, changes to tax law are generally made on a prospective basis such that they apply only from the date on which they have legal effect. This would mean that

intangible assets acquired prior to the date on which any cap is introduced in law would be 'grandfathered' and claims made by reference to those intangible assets would not be subject to a cap.

I requested my Department and Revenue to look at the costings associated with the introduction of a cap on capital allowances for intangible assets and related interest expenses. However, given the complexities involved, further analysis is required to quantify the tax revenues that might be generated as a result of introducing such a cap. Any change in law will be prospective and, therefore, any increase in tax revenues as a result of a restriction on the timing of the reliefs will depend on the scale of claims made in respect of future acquisitions of intangible assets, including any claims made as a consequence of the on-shoring of intangible assets currently held in other jurisdictions.

Corporation Tax Regime

158. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his views on recent EU tax proposals backed by France, Germany, Spain and Italy which would see big multinationals taxed on turnover as opposed to the current system which taxes them on profits, particularly in view of Ireland's economic reliance on US multinationals with their European headquarters here. [39308/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Ireland remains committed to global tax reform and believes that global solutions are needed to ensure tax is paid by companies where value is created. That is why Ireland has been a committed participant in, and strong supporter of, tax reform efforts led by the OECD through the BEPS process.

The OECD is already carrying out important research into the digital economy, with the publication of its interim report expected in Spring 2018. This will provide important input into the ongoing consideration of where value is created in digital business.

It would be premature to take action without considering the OECD analysis and for that reason I do not support the recent proposal to move ahead of the OECD process through the introduction of an equalisation tax based on turnover.

A consistent global approach is needed, as these digital companies are global in nature. Any solution must build on a shared understanding of where value is actually created by digital business. Applying different rules within the EU to what is being applied globally is likely to result in double taxation and greater uncertainty.

Multinationals will always want to have operations in the EU, and Ireland will remain very competitive and attractive as an EU location to invest in and do business from.

Credit Union Mergers

159. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the procedure for membership involvement in credit union mergers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39323/17]

160. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if members voted on the merger of two credit unions (details supplied); the way this vote took place; the way this vote was advertised to members of a credit union; and the way members of a credit union were informed of this merger. [39324/17]

161. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if members voted on the merger of two credit unions (details supplied); the way this took place; the way this vote was advertised to members of a credit union; and the way members of a credit union were informed of this merger. [39325/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 159 to 161, inclusive, together.

A transfer of engagements is a voluntary process whereby all assets, liabilities and undertakings of one or more credit unions are transferred to another credit union. Sections 129 – 132 of the Credit Union Act 1997 set out requirements relating to a transfer of engagements between credit unions. This is a matter for the Registrar of Credit Unions at the Central Bank.

The Central Bank has informed me that it is subject to strict confidentiality requirements and cannot comment on individual credit unions. However, the Central Bank confirmed that the credit unions to which the Deputy refers remain as separate registered credit unions and at this point in time, no transfer of engagements has been undertaken.

In order to transfer its engagements or to undertake to fulfill the engagements of another credit union, a credit union shall resolve to do so by a Special Resolution of their members, or if the Registrar of Credit Unions considers it expedient to do so, by a resolution of the board of directors.

Prior to any transfer of engagements process completing, every member of each credit union concerned must be sent all relevant information in line with the requirements of Section 130 of the Credit Union Act 1997, which includes:

- Notice of a general meeting of the credit union, or where applicable, notice of the resolution passed by the board of directors; and
- A copy of the annual accounts for each credit union concerned for the most recent financial year.

All information in relation to the transfer of engagements process can be found on the Central Bank of Ireland website at the following link: www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/Regulation/industry-market-sectors/credit-unions/credit-union-handbook/cu-handbook--transfers.pdf?sfvrsn=10.

Fiscal Policy

162. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether a margin of compliance (details supplied) is appropriate; and his plans to alter this margin of compliance in advance of budget day. [39330/17]

163. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether over-adhering to the fiscal rules for 2018 would be counterproductive in respect of a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39331/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 162 and 163 together.

Fiscal space is calculated, in the first instance, using the expenditure benchmark. The projected fiscal space from this calculation is then incorporated into the fiscal forecasts, in accordance with Government policy, in order to calculate the resulting general government balance

and, in turn, the projected structural balance. My Department can then determine if the outcome complies with the balanced budget rule. Compliance with the debt reduction rule is also examined.

The outcome from the expenditure benchmark calculation, as set out in the 2017 Summer Economic Statement (SES), resulted in the identification of additional fiscal space of about €150 million above the previous estimate. However, using this additional fiscal space from the expenditure benchmark would result in non-achievement of the medium-term budgetary objective (MTO) next year. In order to ensure achievement of the MTO next year, my Department calculated that it would not be possible to use the additional €150 million of fiscal space in 2018 and this is reflected in the fiscal forecasts in the SES.

This “margin of compliance”, referred to by the Deputy in his questions, has not been factored into minimum compliance with the expenditure benchmark. Not using the additional €150 million will result in over-compliance with the minimum level required by the benchmark. However, this is necessary to help ensure achievement of the MTO in 2018.

Achieving the MTO has been the anchor for fiscal policy since correcting the excessive deficit in 2015. We are on-track to balance the books next year.

At the same time, it is clear that the economy is now on a path towards full-employment. In these circumstances, the focus must increasingly shift towards the appropriate stance of fiscal policy so that policy does not contribute to over-heating the economy. In other words, the focus must be on what is right for the economy and not solely what is legally permissible under the rules. I want to assure the Deputy that the Government will not repeat the mistakes of the past by adopting inappropriate taxation and spending policies.

Property Tax Data

164. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of properties which are currently liable for the property tax; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39332/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that statistics relating to Local Property Tax (LPT) can be found on the statistics webpage of the Revenue website at www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/local-property-tax/index.aspx.

Taking the end 2016 statistics (the most recent year for which complete data are available), www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/local-property-tax/end-of-year-reports/local-property-tax-2016.aspx, these statistics show that 1.886 million properties were returned for the year. This includes properties for which rollover payment instructions were received, new payment instructions, Local Authority owned properties and properties where mandatory deduction at source has been applied. It also includes liable properties where an exemption or deferral is an operation.

It is estimated that this represents a compliance rate of 97% for the 2016 liability year. This rate is calculated from an approximate base of 1.95 million liable properties, extrapolated from Central Statistics Office Census 2011/2016 information and data collected from the administration of LPT since 2013.

The most recent statistics published by Revenue (June 2017) show 1.883million properties returned and a compliance rate estimated at 96% for the current year and further updates will

be published in due course.

Revenue Commissioners Enforcement Activity

165. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of transactions that have been reported to the Revenue Commissioners by obliged promoters since the introduction of the Mandatory Disclosure of Certain Transactions Regulation 2011; and the type of entities from which the reports were received, the form of transaction reported and the criteria under which the reporting was triggered per annum. [39337/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): 1. Number of Transactions Reported to Revenue

Revenue has received eleven disclosures from promoters of tax schemes under the Mandatory Disclosure regime.

Subsequent to receipt of the disclosures, Revenue received from the promoters associated client lists containing the names of 494 taxpayers. While a taxpayer may be listed on a client list this, in itself, is not evidence that the taxpayer actually participated in and implemented the tax scheme disclosed. In the case of each individual listed an enquiry has to be carried out to determine if, and to what extent, the scheme was implemented by the individual concerned.

2. Types of Entity

The disclosures have been received from the following types of entity:

- Large General Accountancy and Tax Firms (4)
- Specialist Tax Advisory Practices (4)
- Financial / Wealth Management Practices (2)
- Corporate Trustee (1)

3. Form of Transaction Reported and Criteria Under which the Transaction was Reported (per annum)

Eleven schemes have been disclosed under the mandatory disclosure regime. Four relate to employee benefit trusts (these are arrangements designed to deliver tax-free benefits to employees). Three relate to various artificial loss schemes. Two relate to share transactions. The remaining two schemes relate to assets and liabilities of a partnership transferred to a limited company (in these cases the transaction described was found to be in order).

All disclosures have been examined and, where appropriate, enquiries have been opened in respect of those who have been identified as participants in the schemes. In addition, where appropriate, Revenue has recommended amendments to the legislation being exploited.

Property Tax Data

166. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the breakdown of local property tax, LPT, which is deferred on the basis of inability to pay by local authority; the total income from interest in 2015, 2016 and 2017 that arises from deferred LPT; the rate of interest applied; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39368/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Part 12 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) provides for a deferral or partial deferral (50%) of LPT where certain specified circumstances exist. These circumstances include ‘Income Level’, ‘Hardship’, ‘Personal Insolvency’ and ‘Personal Representative of a Deceased Person’.

Once granted, a deferral normally remains in place for the duration of the ‘Valuation Period’, which is currently 1 May 2013 to 31 October 2019. Where a deferral is in place, the outstanding liability automatically attaches as a charge on the property and must be paid before a sale or transfer can be completed. Interest is also charged on the deferred amount at a rate of 4% per annum.

There are currently 62,500 properties with LPT deferrals in place, most of which are in respect of the entire ‘Valuation Period’ (2013-2019). The following table sets out the value of the deferrals broken down by Local Authority. The total accumulated interest to date is €5m of which €2.6m relates to the years specified by the Deputy (2015, 2016 and 2017).

Local Authority	No of properties	Deferral Liability 2013€	Deferral Liability 2014€	Deferral Liability 2015€	Deferral Liability 2016€	Deferral Liability 2017€
Carlow	885	45,324	111,780	138,830	153,815	153,230
Cavan	1149	51,231	125,775	155,925	175,410	171,000
Clare	1650	78,582	200,340	210,426	247,765	284,535
Cork City	1719	133,889	298,935	305,505	330,644	362,745
Cork County	4367	309,681	741,727	772,889	931,189	972,304
Donegal	3586	151,865	392,040	487,381	570,240	554,580
Dublin City	7526	1,089,802	2,418,250	2,238,771	2,372,884	2,325,032
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	1775	356,505	794,747	746,601	806,495	789,312
Fingal	3129	369,754	861,616	817,949	880,687	865,555
Galway City	769	68,397	160,920	184,140	205,470	199,170
Galway County	2241	108,242	270,810	342,855	400,545	435,555
Kerry	1806	96,152	232,650	297,135	361,170	355,545
Kildare	2498	198,260	488,610	512,406	572,917	611,775
Kilkenny	1127	59,812	151,560	179,640	205,740	205,965
Laois	1162	50,204	129,375	155,880	180,675	179,775
Leitrim	456	18,072	45,675	56,475	65,385	63,990
Limerick	2834	161,691	389,295	445,265	513,038	549,748
Longford	614	22,344	53,505	65,149	79,948	77,972
Louth	2313	128,999	313,741	366,393	423,662	421,690
Mayo	1702	73,614	188,235	231,112	282,683	274,770
Meath	2695	196,505	470,925	551,745	627,120	622,665
Monaghan	882	37,315	99,315	125,865	132,458	142,605
Offaly	1182	55,060	140,760	174,150	203,490	198,540

Local Authority	No of properties	Deferral Liability 2013€	Deferral Liability 2014€	Deferral Liability 2015€	Deferral Liability 2016€	Deferral Liability 2017€
Roscommon	877	33,434	84,690	108,270	123,255	120,555
Sligo	845	40,931	101,070	121,497	142,425	136,890
South Dublin	3322	374,776	864,650	815,024	885,664	878,339
Tipperary	2159	106,553	261,764	314,954	369,841	368,177
Waterford	1775	98,139	232,020	274,657	318,870	308,430
Westmeath	1203	65,019	156,915	181,420	215,903	214,335
Wexford	2499	138,886	341,595	408,269	464,220	473,310
Wicklow	1809	165,735	402,060	385,891	515,955	513,030
Total	62,556	4,884,773	11,525,350	12,172,469	13,759,563	13,831,124

Mortgage Lending

167. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Finance the affordability criteria that are considered by banks for a person buying their second home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39399/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There are certain legislative and regulatory provisions governing the provision of residential mortgage credit to consumer borrowers. One of the key measures is the Central Bank of Ireland macro-prudential measures which apply proportionate loan-to-value and loan-to-income limits to mortgage lending by regulated financial service providers. For principal dwelling home mortgages, the loan-to-income limit is set at 3.5 times gross income though lenders have the flexibility to exceed that threshold each year in respect of up to 20 per cent of housing credit. More generally the European Union (Consumer Mortgage Credit Agreements) Regulations 2016 places an obligation on lenders to assess the creditworthiness of residential mortgage borrowers and it also provides that credit shall only be made available where the assessment indicates that the borrower is likely to be able to meet the obligations of the proposed credit agreement. The Central Bank Consumer Protection Code also places a requirement on lenders to assess the affordability of credit, including a consideration of the personal consumer's ability to repay the mortgage on the basis of a 2 per cent increase in the mortgage rate above that offered to the borrower. (However, this test does not apply where the interest rate is fixed for a period of five years or more). Subject to complying with these legislative and regulatory requirements it is a matter for lenders to set their own mortgage credit policies and to make their own individual mortgage lending decisions. Ultimately, the decision on whether or not to provide credit, or the amount of credit to offer, in any particular case is a commercial decision for the individual lender. As Minister for Finance, I would not have a role in such commercial decisions.

Tax Data

168. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons who on receipt of a lump sum at retirement exceeded their tax free lump sum threshold of €200,000 in each of the years 2014 to 2016 in tabular form; the number of persons who were taxed at 20% reduced income tax and no USC on the portion of their lump sum between €200,001 and €500,000; and the number of persons who were subject to full taxation on their sum on the

amount in excess of €500,000. [39454/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 790AA of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides for the taxation of retirement lump sums, paid under various pension arrangements that are above the specified tax-free limit of €200,000.

The following table sets out the total number of relevant retirement lump sum payments (i.e. greater than €200,000) and the associated tax collected for the years 2014 to 2016. Revenue has advised me that its records are not maintained in a manner that facilitates extracting the individual tax rates or USC amounts involved.

Revenue has also advised me that the portion of a retirement lump sum in excess of €500,000 is regarded as profits or gains arising from an office or employment and is taxed under PAYE along with the taxpayers other PAYE income. Accordingly, it is not separately distinguished from other income from the employment in the relevant year, and therefore it is not possible to provide statistics in relation to this portion of lump sum income.

Year	Total number of retirement lump sum payments greater than €200,000	Total tax paid (millions)
2014	888	€12.2
2015	883	€14.8
2016	910	€13.2

Universal Social Charge

169. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated full year cost of abolishing the USC for all income earners earning under €100,000 in 2018 while maintaining it as it is for all income over €100,000 (details supplied). [39461/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the estimated full year cost of abolishing the Universal Social Charge (USC) in 2018 on all income less than €100,000 is €2,924 million. This costing includes the abolition of USC on all income up to €100,000, i.e., those earning in excess of €100,000 only pay USC on the portion of their earnings in excess of €100,000. This costing includes the retention of the 3% USC surcharge for those income earners deemed to be self-employed.

This estimate has 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 estimate is provisional and may be revised.

Tax Code

170. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Finance the reason special needs assistants are not entitled to claim flat rate expenses; his plans to extend flat rate expenses to cover persons such as special needs assistants in budget 2018 in view of the fact that flat rate expenses are available as a tax write off for a number of professions, including teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39466/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The legislation governing the deductibility of expenses incurred in employment is contained in section 114 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. The provision dictates that for an expense to qualify as a deduction against

income from an office or employment, the expense must be wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred in the performance of the duties of the office or employment.

For ease of administration, where a large number of employees incur broadly identical expenses which are not reimbursed by their employer, a standard flat rate expenses allowance may be agreed between Revenue and representatives of groups or classes of employees. The agreed deduction is then applied to all employees of the class or group in question.

It should be noted that any employee who is obliged to defray expenses incurred wholly, necessarily and exclusively in the course of their employment may make a claim to Revenue to deduct such expenses from their taxable emoluments irrespective of the existence or otherwise of a Flat Rate Expenses agreement.

If a representative body acting on behalf of employed special needs assistants wishes to advance a case for a Flat Rate Expense amount they should contact Revenue's Personal Taxes Policy & Legislation Division, New Stamping Building, Dublin Castle, Dublin 2.

Tax Collection

171. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of tax in dispute by band; and the number of cases in each band, in tabular form. [39468/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the aggregate amount of all taxes and duties in dispute by way of appeal currently stands at close to €1.5 billion. The following table contains information relating to all cases currently under appeal before the Tax Appeals Commission.

Band	Number of Appeals (see note)	Amount in Dispute(€)
0 to 10,000	2,214	3,400,399
10,000 to 50,000	886	24,376,355
50,000 to 100,000	428	30,176,570
100,000 to 500,000	558	122,276,407
500,000 to 1,000,000	109	77,436,366
1,000,000 to 2,000,000	85	123,820,913
2,000,000 to 3,000,000	32	77,096,546
3,000,000 to 4,000,000	14	48,643,434
4,000,000 to 5,000,000	11	49,984,379
5,000,000 to 10,000,000	24	165,450,247
Over 10,000,000	26	811,368,921
Totals	4,387	1,534,030,537

Note: A taxpayer may appeal against tax assessments relating to a number of tax periods in respect of the same issue. Each of these is counted as an individual appeal.

Tax Data

172. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Finance the length of time that persons have been waiting for a hearing since they lodged their appeal, by year, in tabular form.

[39469/17]

173. **Deputy Jim O’Callaghan** asked the Minister for Finance the number of months that persons have been waiting to receive a determination after their appeal has been heard, in tabular form. [39470/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 172 and 173 together.

I am advised by the Tax Appeals Commission (TAC) that it is not currently in a position to provide all the information requested by the Deputy as certain appeals related data is either not routinely collated by the TAC or is not collated in a form that is readily accessible. The TAC is currently taking steps to address these issues through the introduction of its case management system. When completed it will be possible to extract more flexible and relevant appeals related data from the TAC’s case management system.

In relation to the length of time that persons have been waiting for a hearing since they lodged their appeal, the Deputy may be interested to know that not all appeals submitted will proceed to a hearing. I am advised that some appellants may choose to have their case dealt with by, inter alia, correspondence and thus not require a hearing. Notwithstanding, whether a case requires a hearing or is dealt with by correspondence, all cases must progress through the appeals system in order to ascertain the appropriate action required. In this regard, I am advised that only once a case has been fully processed, all directions complied with and all supporting documentation received from both parties, is a case ready to be listed for hearing.

I am also informed that cases can fail to progress to the hearing stage for a number of factors including that the appeal is withdrawn or that the appellant and Revenue reach a settlement thus negating the need for further TAC involvement. The Deputy may be interested to know that, based upon the latest available figures, 89 cases received by the TAC in 2016 were settled by agreement between the appellant and Revenue, 64 of which had settled within 3 months of the submission of the appeal. These figures along with further analysis of the work of the TAC is available in the TAC’s 2016 Annual Report, which can be accessed on their website, www.taxappeals.ie.

In relation to the length of time persons have been waiting for a determination after their appeal has been heard, I am advised by the TAC that it is not possible for it to compile all the necessary information requested by the Deputy in the time available. The TAC have further advised me that a response is being prepared which will be provided to the Deputy as soon as possible.

As the Deputy may be aware, the TAC currently has a public consultation on its rules and procedures open to submissions from members of the public and all other interested parties who may wish to make submissions.

Question No. 174 answered with Question No. 156.

IBRC Liquidation

175. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 133 of 11 September 2017, if he will provide copies of all minutes of meetings between his Department and the special liquidators in relation to the costs of the liquidation of IBRC since 7 February 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39534/17]

176. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 133 of 11 September 2017, the queries in relation to costs that were raised by him with the special liquidators; the way in which these were addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39535/17]

179. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Finance the policies, reporting requirements and specific oversight procedures he has put in place since 7 February 2013 for the costs of the liquidation and the special liquidators of IBRC; if he has engaged an external party or other State entity to examine and challenge the invoices produced; the work upon which the costs are based; the method of charging and calculation of such costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39538/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 175, 176 and 179 together.

As previously advised, the Special Liquidators publish an annual progress update report on the liquidation of IBRC which is publicly available and this report also has a section on fees and costs of the liquidation and also outlines the various cost management activities undertaken by the Special Liquidators and the nature of the on-going interaction with the Department in this regard.

Since the liquidation of IBRC in February 2013, the Special Liquidators have published 4 such progress update reports, all of which are available on the Department of Finance website.

On 6 June 2014 the Special Liquidators published the first progress update report which covers the period from 7 February 2013 to 31 March 2014 and is available through the following link

www.finance.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/IBRC-Progress-Update-Report-6th-June-2014.pdf.

On 12 March 2015 the second progress update report was published which covers the 9 month period to 31 December 2014 and also the 23 month period from the beginning of the liquidation in February 2013 to 31 December 2014, this report is available through the following link

www.finance.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/IBRC-Progress-Update-Report-12th-March-2015.pdf.

On 27 May 2016 the third progress update report was published which covers the 12 month period to 31 December 2015 and also the 35 month period from the beginning of the liquidation to in February 2013 to 31 December 2015, this report is available through the following link www.finance.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/IBRC-Progress-Update-Report-27th-May-2016.pdf.

On 5 May 2017, the fourth (and most recent) progress update report was published by the Special Liquidators covering the 12 month period to 31 December 2016 and also the 47 month period from the beginning of the liquidation in February 2013 to 31 December 2016, this report is available through the following link

www.finance.gov.ie/wpcontent/uploads/2017/07/IBRC-Progress-Update-Report-5th-May-2017.pdf.

I am advised by my officials that they receive a quarterly report from the Special Liquidators which gives an update on the liquidation of IBRC. This report outlines the progress being

made by the Special Liquidators on the various work streams which are on-going. The report also provides a fee update for the period for which the report relates to. Department of Finance officials review these reports once received and revert to the Special Liquidators should they have any queries on any aspect of the report. Minutes of meetings with the Special Liquidators are commercially sensitive due to the ongoing nature of the liquidation.

The most recent queries in relation to costs raised by my officials have been in relation to costs associated with the on-going Commission of Investigation and also the mortgage redress project and interest overcharging project; all of which have been intensive work streams for the Special Liquidators and their team.

As previously advised, 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 and 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.

IBRC Liquidation

177. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 134 of 11 September 2017, the basis on which the rebate of €5 million was provided by the special liquidators in respect of their costs; if this or other rebates were requested by him; the way in which the sum of €5 million was calculated; if it related to overcharging or failure to deliver the services that were the subject of the original charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39536/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised that Department of Finance officials met with the Special Liquidators of IBRC in November 2013 in order to discuss the level of costs being incurred as a result of the liquidation. This meeting was requested given the significant increase of workload being incurred over and above what was expected by the Department of Finance when the original special liquidation rates (based on discounted NAMA rates) were agreed. All aspects of the liquidation were reviewed including the on-going IBRC overheads, the Special Liquidator fees and professional advisor fees. At that meeting it was agreed that the Special Liquidators would perform a comprehensive review of their own costs and revert with a view to imposing a significant reduction. I am advised that this request for a reduction in costs from KPMG was not requested as a result of previous overcharging or failure to deliver services. Agreement was reached with KPMG in December 2013 to provide an overall reduction of €5m. All other negotiation of rebates on professional and legal fees as part of the special liquidation were a matter for the Special Liquidators who were asked by Department of Finance officials to negotiate these and this resulted in the agreement of rebates on already reduced rates with A&L Goodbody Solicitors and Linklaters Solicitors. Total rebates from these two firms amounted to €3m (to 31 December 2016) which meant that the total rebates received since the start of the liquidation are €8m. After KPMG, A&L Goodbody Solicitors and Linklaters solicitors have been the two largest recipients of fees arising from the special liquidation of IBRC.

Page 39 of the most recent progress update report from the Special Liquidators outlines the rebates agreed:

www.finance.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/170505-IBRC-Progress-update-report-

report_31-Dec-16.pdf.

IBRC Liquidation

178. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 134 of 11 September 2017, the way in which a statement (details supplied) is correct; if he will request the special liquidators to provide the information requested in view of the fact that further to Parliamentary Question No. 286 of 9 June 2015 he provided same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39537/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Question 134 of 11 September 2017, which you posed, asked for a breakdown in relation to the number of persons, by grade, performing the work of the Special Liquidators. Question 286 of 9 June 2015 asked for a breakdown of the hourly rates of each grade.

I am advised by the Special Liquidators that the commercial sensitivities are around disclosing the details in relation to the number of persons, by grade, performing the work on the special liquidation and not the hourly rates per grade. The hourly rates per grade remain as per what was agreed at the start of the liquidation and, as per the response to parliamentary question 286 of 9 June 2015, are set out in the table below. These rates are based on NAMA negotiated rates for the relevant services. These rates were put in place following a competitive tender conducted by NAMA.

Grade	Rate Per Hour (excluding VAT)
Partner	€295
Director	€260
Associate Director	€220
Manager	€190
Supervisor	€165
Senior Accountant	€165
Semi-senior accountant	€165
Junior accountant	€95

Question No. 179 answered with Question No. 175.

Employment Investment Incentive Scheme

180. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of applications received under the employment and investment incentive scheme in each year of its existence; the number of applications approved and refused respectively; the number in which decisions are still awaited; the amount invested each year; the average turnaround time for a decision from the Revenue Commissioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39549/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): 1. Revenue advises me that the numbers of applications received and the numbers of companies approved or refused for the Employment and Investment Incentive (EII) for each year since its introduction were as follows:

Year	Total Received	Approved	Refused
2012	83	78	5
2013	211	190	21

Year	Total Received	Approved	Refused
2014	256	239	17
2015	310	279	31
2016	322	261	61
2017 (year to date)	312	262	50
Total	1,494	1,309	185

2. The number of new cases currently awaiting processing is 215. This does not include cases where taxpayers have been asked to provide additional information but have not yet done so as many of those cases relate to incomplete applications.

3. The amounts invested each year since the introduction of the EII were as follows:

Year	Total Amount Invested €M
2012	13.4
2013	42.4
2014	62.7
2015	74.1
2016	108.5

As a number of the approvals for 2017 are outline approvals, rather than approvals in respect of shares issued, it is not possible to quantify the amount to be invested.

4. It is not possible to give an average time taken to issue a decision. Where a full application, with all supporting documentation, is received, a decision will issue more quickly than a case where additional information and clarifications must be sought. Equally, it takes less time to carry out the level of examination required in respect of a claim by a company with a simple corporate structure than a claim in respect of a complex corporate grouping. At present, in respect of the more complex cases, it can take up to three months for a reply to issue.

5. Finally, Revenue also advises me that a number of statistical reports on EII are available on

www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/tax-expenditures/eii.aspx#.

Flood Risk Assessments

181. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if he will instruct insurance companies to reassess the risk of flooding based on the Office of Public Works flood risk maps for the area of Abberley, Killiney, County Dublin and not on outdated flood risk information; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39558/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am aware of the difficulties that the absence or withdrawal of flood insurance cover can cause to homeowners and businesses, and that is one of the reasons the Government has been prioritising investment in flood defences over the last number of years.

However, you should be aware that the provision of insurance is a commercial matter for insurance companies, which has to be based on a proper assessment of the risks they are accepting. This assessment will in many cases include insurers own presumptions based on their private modelling and research. Consequently, neither the Government nor the Central Bank

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 doing so.

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.

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.

I am advised by the OPW that the current position regarding the CFRAM Programme is that the review by the OPW of the final versions of the Flood Risk Management Plans, having taken account of the submissions received during public and statutory consultation is almost completed. The majority of the Plans are now with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for their independent review of the environmental assessments. Once this independent review is completed and observations addressed, the final Plans will be formally submitted for approval.

While it is not possible for me to comment on individual cases in great detail, I understand that the specific maps relating to Abberley, Killiney, Co. Dublin have been finalised and will be published on the dedicated website on the day of the launch of the CFRAM Programme.

It is important to note that the flood maps are community based maps and provide a useful resource for planning and emergency response and cannot be used for commercial purposes. The insurance industry uses its own flood modelling tools for assessing the level of risk to individual properties.

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.

Insurance Fraud

182. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider recommending that insurance companies show the actual cost of insurance fraud on each individual

insurance premium, in view of the fact that highlighting the actual cost to a person's insurance may increase the number of persons that report insurance fraud and may help reduce the overall cost per year to insurers and customers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39610/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): At the outset, the Deputy should note that tackling fraud is one of the six key objectives within the Action Plan of the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance. This Report recommended the setting up of a fully functioning insurance fraud database for industry to detect patterns of fraud. A dedicated Working Group has been set up in the Department of Justice and Equality to implement this recommendation. A further recommendation which is being actively examined is aimed at exploring the potential for further co-operation between the insurance sector and An Garda Síochána in relation to insurance fraud investigation.

The Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance also recommended the provision of additional information to consumers by insurers on their premium breakdown. This recommendation is being implemented by the Central Bank of Ireland who are undertaking a consultation process to determine what information should be included. Due to their role in implementing this recommendation, my officials contacted the Central Bank on the idea of including the estimated cost of insurance fraud on each individual insurance premium and they indicated that this “would appear to be a complex process. Due to the nature of insurance fraud it would not be feasible to accurately estimate the exact cost of fraud and attribute it to an individual policy. Therefore any attribution of ‘fraud cost’ to an individual policy would be artificial and ultimately not of benefit to the policyholder.”

My officials also contacted Insurance Ireland in relation to your question and were informed that it has been running advertising campaigns for many years highlighting the cost of fraudulent activity and encouraging the public to report suspected fraudulent activity through its “Insurance Confidential” service. As part of an ongoing campaign which was launched last year, advertisements have highlighted the view that insurance fraud adds €50 to the average motor insurance premium, with insurance fraud estimated to cost the whole industry €200 million a year.

Insurance Ireland has indicated that 9,000 cases of suspected fraud have been received and investigated through its “Insurance Confidential” website and related lo-call phone number. It also claims that the current high-profile campaign – run across broadcast and online outlets, including social media – has led to increases in the number of cases of fraud reported to “Insurance Confidential”, as well in the number of visitors to the website and an overall increased awareness of the service.

Finally, fraud continues to be examined during the second phase of the Cost of Insurance Working Group, which is focused on employer and public liability. While the issues under consideration in respect of employer liability insurance and public liability insurance are particularly complex and raise a number of constitutional questions, it is hoped that a final report will be published during the autumn/winter term. As with the first phase, the aim is for all relevant bodies and stakeholders to work together in order to deliver the objectives of fairer premiums and a more stable and competitive market without unnecessary delay.

Interest Rates

183. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance the action being taken to reduce variable interest rates in the banking sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[39652/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The issue of standard variable mortgage rates is a significant one for this Government and the Programme for a Partnership Government has set out a number of important and practical measures which seek to improve the position of variable rate mortgage holders.

A key item was the request to the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) to conduct a review of the Irish mortgage market. The CCPC has recently produced its report and it outlines a range of short, medium and long term options to improve the operation of the market. The Government will now evaluate and consider these options in detail. A web link to the report is attached for information:

www.ccpc.ie/business/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2017/06/CCPC-Mortgages-Options-Paper.pdf.

The Government also believes that measures to encourage and promote a greater level of switching in the mortgage market will help boost the level of competition in the market for existing mortgages. In particular, the Programme for a Partnership Government considers that the development of a code of conduct for switching mortgage provider would be a useful and practical initiative which would have the potential to deliver savings to many existing mortgage holders. In line with this commitment, in 2016 the Central Bank commenced research in the area of mortgage switching which was completed earlier this year. Based on this research, the Central Bank has now commenced a consultation process on proposed measures to help consumers to compare their existing mortgage to other mortgage options and to provide consumers with standardised switching information:

www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/publications/Consultation-Papers/cp112/cp112-enhanced-mortgage-measures---transparency-and-switching.pdf?sfvrsn=2.

The Central Bank has already made some changes to require lenders to better inform and protect variable rate mortgage holders in relation to changes in mortgage rates. These were set out in an Addendum to the Consumer Protection Code 2012 and require lenders to explain to borrowers how their variable interest rates have been set, including in the event of an interest rate increase. The measures will also improve the level of information to be provided to borrowers about other mortgage products their lender provides that could provide savings for the borrower and signpost borrowers to the CCPC's mortgage switching tool.

In overall terms, the Government is of the opinion that increased competition rather than administrative controls is the best way to ensure that retail lending rates are driven down in a sustainable way for the market as a whole but without giving rise to potentially undesirable consequences for the provision of new mortgage lending. There has been some progress in this area. Recently published Central Bank data showed that standard variable mortgage rates for new PDH mortgages fell by 23 basis points to 3.34 per cent in quarter 2 2017 since the same period in 2016, and the further variable rate mortgage reduction announced last week by a main mortgage lender will have a further welcome impact on overall mortgage rates. However, this is a policy area that the Government will continue to keep under active review in its ongoing engagement with mortgage lenders and in implementing the Programme for Government commitments to help deliver on a long term basis better outcomes for all mortgage borrowers.

Credit Union Regulation

184. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been

drawn to the fact that core credit unions have taken a vote to expel members who have less than €10 in their account; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39719/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Credit Union Act 1997 (1997 Act) contains provisions in relation to membership, membership approval and expulsion.

In particular Section 17(3) of the 1997 Act states that a person shall not be a member unless he has at least one fully paid-up share in the credit union, but the rules of the credit union shall not require a person to have more than €10, or such larger sum as may be prescribed, in fully paid-up shares as a condition of membership. In addition Section 17(8) of the 1997 Act states that a member of a credit union shall not be excluded from membership by any amendment of the credit union's rules registered after he became a member.

Individual credit unions may prescribe rules on membership. These rules must be in accordance with sections 13 to 15 of the 1997 Act, and must not conflict with the legislative requirements of the Act.

Where a member is seeking information or has concerns regarding the operation of their credit union, they should request this information from their credit union in the first instance, including clarification on what rules applied to that particular member at the time they became a member.

The Registrar of Credit Unions at the Central Bank is the independent regulator for credit unions. Within her 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.

Question No. 185 answered with Question No. 147.

Economic Competitiveness

186. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance the policies he is implementing to ensure that the State remains competitive; the number of recommendations that are being implemented from the most recent national competitiveness council report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39746/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Addressing Ireland's economic competitiveness is a key economic policy priority for Government, as outlined in the Summer Economic Statement published in July. The Action Plan for Jobs 2017 sets out a range of initiatives across Government Departments to support competitiveness. The National Competitiveness Council has reported regularly to the relevant Cabinet Committee where its recommendations are considered by the appropriate line Departments. This facilitates timely attention to areas of opportunity for improvement.

In its 2016 Competitiveness Challenge the Council acknowledged the improvement in Ireland's public finances in recent years and recommended that Ireland continue to maintain a sound budgetary position. Pointing out that the Exchequer is still running a deficit, the Council highlighted the necessity of broadening the tax base in a manner that supports employment and enterprise. It also emphasised the need to ensure continued transparency and simplicity in relation to our tax structure. The Council also outlined recommendations that Ireland continue to develop a suite of tax offerings to ensure it is internationally competitive for enterprise and attuned to evolving sectors and activities particularly in the context of continued engagement with the OECD's Base Erosion and Profit Shifting project. The Council recommended an ap-

appropriate balancing of the need to meet our obligations under the Stability and Growth Pact and the need to put in place a sustainable, counter-cyclical, medium-term fiscal planning process with the need to increase capital investment to enhance competitiveness and support enterprise.

The Council's recommendations in relation to the importance of maintaining fiscal sustainability and ensuring that the tax system is internationally competitive and rewards work, investment and entrepreneurship are in accordance with Government fiscal policy as reflected in the fiscal stance in successive budgets and in this year's Summer Economic Statement. They inform my Department's ongoing consideration of further measures to maintain economic competitiveness which will be set out in Budget 2018.

Irish Fiscal Advisory Council

187. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if he has met the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council recently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39747/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I can confirm to the Deputy that I have not met with the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council (IFAC) since assuming my role as Minister for Finance. In July of this year I met with the Chairman of the IFAC, Mr Seamus Coffey, in relation to the Review of Ireland's Corporation Tax Code. This meeting did not relate to Mr Coffey's work as Chair of the Fiscal Council.

Budget Statement

188. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider introducing a VAT compensation scheme to provide relief from VAT if only on a partial basis initially on activities undertaken by charities here in the context of budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39758/17]

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.

Data Protection

189. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the instances in which customer data was lost or misplaced by banks (details supplied); if such instances were referred to the Data Protection Commissioner; the policy of each bank on employees travelling with printed documents containing personal and confidential information relating to customers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39759/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I, as Minister for Finance, have no statutory role in relation to the matters referred to in the question. As the Deputy will be aware the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner comes under the aegis of my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality.

I am aware of recent media reports on the loss of certain customer data. I have been informed by the AIB Group that it adheres to the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner's Personal Data Security Breach Code of Practice in respect of the bank's reporting obligations. In addition, all AIB staff are subject to a number of Bank Policies, Standards and Guidance

documents in relation to safety and security of AIB customer and business information. The Bank's Information Security Policy and Standards prescribe the Bank's standards and controls in respect of the handling and transfer of confidential and sensitive information and provides that the confidentiality of customer, staff and business information must be maintained at all times.

AIB has informed me that all staff are required to keep documents, files and folders in a secure environment and ensure that confidential documents are not read in public view and to use electronic means of securing the data where possible. When a staff member becomes aware of any incident where customer or employee information has potentially been compromised they must immediately report the incident to the Data Protection Team. A Data Protection error is also logged on the Bank's internal Complaints & Error Management systems. The Data Protection Team record all confirmed Data Protection breaches, manage all interactions with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner and advise business areas on the resolution of incidents. AIB's Information Security Standards For All booklet also provides guidance to staff on the handling of information in their care and provides that confidential paper must not be left unattended and or taken out of the office unless required. AIB staff are also reminded through on-going training and awareness sessions that protecting customer information is a key part of the Information Security and Risk Awareness procedures and is fundamental to their Data Protection obligations to keep personal data safe and secure.

I have been informed by the Bank of Ireland Group that it is committed to ensuring the privacy rights of individuals are upheld at all times and that it has policies in place to preserve the confidentiality of personal data it holds, in line with the Data Protection Commissioner's approved Personal Data Security Breach Code of Practice. The risks of accidental disclosure or loss of personal information are addressed through business controls and standards to protect such data during collection, processing, storage and transmission (transportation).

Permanent TSB have informed me that the bank fully complies with the Personal Data Security Breach Code of Practice, including reporting breaches to the Commissioner. PTSB takes its data protection and information security responsibilities seriously and has appropriate policies and procedures in this regard. For example their Code of Ethics, which is applicable to all staff, specifically refers to a duty of care to safeguard the confidentiality of their customers' data.

I understand from KBC that the bank manages instances in which customer data is lost or misplaced in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003 and the Data Protection Commissioner's Personal Data Security Breach Code of Practice. KBC Bank takes appropriate security measures to help prevent against unauthorised access to, or alteration, disclosure or destruction of personal data and to help prevent against its accidental loss or destruction. This includes adopting enhanced security measures where personal data is being stored or processed outside of a KBC Bank office location.

Ulster Bank Ireland DAC has informed me that it takes its Data Protection responsibilities very seriously. They are registered with the Data Protection Commissioner (DPC) and actively follow the Personal Data Security Privacy Breach Code of Practice so that all known instances of customer data loss and/or misplacement are reported to the DPC. Their internal security policies set out how customer data should be managed, handled and stored.

On the issue more generally, the Central Bank has informed me that Irish Credit Institutions are required to notify regulators of operational risk and loss events. This condition is imposed on the banks' licenses under Section 10 of the Central Bank Act, 1971. However, the Bank cannot disclose any specific information to third parties relating to its interactions with individual

credit institutions per the Central Bank Act, 1942.

Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

190. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Finance the reason an organisation (details supplied) is deemed ineligible for the disabled drivers and disabled passengers scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39782/17]

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.

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 reapply if there is a deterioration in their condition.

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

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.

Flood Relief Schemes

191. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the difficulty faced by some home owners along river banks and flood prone areas in obtaining home insurance; his plans to introduce a scheme, similar to the flood re scheme in the UK, whereby the Government assists flood prone home owners obtain affordable cover for their homes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39836/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am conscious of the difficulties that

the absence or withdrawal of flood insurance cover can cause to homeowners and businesses, 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.

In my role 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.

The Department of Finance carried out a review of policy in relation to flood insurance in 2016, which formed part of the Interdepartmental Flood Policy Coordination Group Interim Report, as approved by Government in November 2016. As part of the review, the Department examined a number of possible approaches including approaches in other jurisdictions. It was considered that the approach of an Insurance Pool with State Indemnification similar to Flood Re would lead to additional levies being imposed on all household insurance policies at a time of increasing insurance costs, and could potentially lead to a considerable financial exposure to the State in the form of a State backstop.

The review recommended the continuation of the existing policy approach which has been in place since 2010, and confirmed by Government again in November 2016. This policy is focused on the development of a sustainable, planned and risk based approach to dealing with flooding problems, which should in turn 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.

This strategy is complemented by a Memorandum of Understanding between the OPW and Insurance Ireland, the representative body for insurance companies in Ireland, which provides for the exchange of data in relation to completed flood defence schemes which should provide a basis for the increased provision of flood insurance in areas where works have been completed. In this regard, the Insurance Ireland/OPW working group, which the Department of Finance attends, now meets on a quarterly basis to support the information flow and improve the understanding of issues between both parties.

The most recent Insurance Ireland survey of approximately 85% of the property insurance market in Ireland indicates that of 16 completed defence schemes, 90% of policies in areas benefitting from permanent flood defences include flood cover, with 77% of policies in areas benefitting from demountable defences including flood cover.

Question No. 192 answered with Question No. 147.

Brexit Issues

193. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary

Question No. 214 of 11 September 2017, if the Revenue Commissioners have assessed the additional resources which would be required if the UK left the customs union; the reason this is not possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39867/17]

194. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance if customs officials are targeting an increase in the percentage of physical examinations of consignments in the context of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39868/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 193 and 194 together.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that they are actively engaged in examining a range of scenarios in order to support Ireland's Brexit objectives. As previously indicated, until the shape of post-Brexit arrangements becomes clear, it will not be possible to formulate specific plans. 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. The future trading relationship between the UK and EU will only be discussed during Phase 2 of the Article 50 negotiations, therefore it is premature to speculate on the customs arrangements that will apply.

European Banking Authority

195. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance the proposals put forward as part of the State's bid to host the European Banking Authority to ensure the retention of specialised staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39869/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The procedure agreed by the European Council for the relocation of the European Agencies currently located in London, the European Banking Authority (EBA) and the European Medicines Authority (EMA), stresses that the business continuity of the two Agencies is vital and must be ensured.

Business continuity is one of the six essential criteria in the relocation selection process and concerns among other things the ability to allow the EBA to maintain their expert staff and to attract highly qualified staff from the relevant sectors, in case not all current staff should choose to relocate. It also concerns the capacity to ensure a smooth transition to the new location and to guarantee continued operation of the Authority which should remain operational during the transition.

Ireland's bid to host the EBA sets out how a relocation to Dublin offers the least disruptive move for the Authority, its staff and their families, and outlines the factors which make Dublin the best location to ensure the greatest retention of EBA staff.

The proximity of Dublin to London, geographically, culturally, and linguistically, would make the relocation to Dublin less demanding for the specialised staff of the Authority than a move to other potential locations, thus encouraging retention of staff.

Ireland is also well placed to provide employment opportunities for spouses and partners of EBA staff, with a well-established financial services centre, and diverse economy which is home to a large number of well-known foreign and domestic multinationals. In addition, Ireland's diversified financial services centre provides a large pool of highly qualified staff that can be used to replace those EBA staff that choose not to move from London.

As a sign of Ireland's commitment to the EBA staff, who are facing significant disruptions and uncertainty due to the move from London in a relatively short timeframe, the offer proposes

financial and organisational commitments to assist in relocation.

This includes support from Government Departments and their agencies, along with financial contributions for the Authority and its staff, which seek to make the move from the United Kingdom as smooth as possible.

In the event of Dublin being chosen as the location for the EBA, a Relocation Group will be formed, to support the smooth transition to Dublin. The Group will involve officials from the Department of Finance, other relevant Government Departments and State agencies. The remit of this group will include ensuring the Headquarters Agreement between Ireland and the EBA is in place prior to its move to Dublin. The Agreement will include all the conditions offered by Ireland to the EBA and its staff.

In terms of education facilities for the children of EBA staff, the Department of Education and Skills will provide services of an appropriate nature which may include mother-tongue tuition and/or European Baccalaureate provision.

The Department of Social Protection will also provide support to EBA staff with social welfare matters and EURES Ireland (the Irish branch of the European Employment Services Network, managed by the Department of Social Protection) will offer a dedicated point of contact to provide information and support on working and living conditions in Ireland to the Authority staff, spouses and their dependants.

In addition to these supports, Ireland proposes an offer of up to €1m towards the provision of professional relocation services for the EBA staff and their families. It is intended that a private company would be sourced, following a tender process, to provide such a service.

The financial part of the support package outlined in Ireland's bid will only become payable in the event that Dublin is chosen as the location to host the EBA.

Mortgage Interest Rates

196. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if banks (details supplied) allow their existing mortgage customers on a variable interest rate linked to their loan-to-value ratio or on a loan-to-value interest rate to move down to a lower loan-to-value band on the basis of an up-to-date valuation of their home and, therefore, benefit from the lower interest rate associated with that lower loan-to-value band. [39904/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the Central Bank of Ireland introduced an Addendum to the Consumer Protection Code 2012 in February of this year. These new regulatory provisions are designed to better inform and protect rate mortgage holders in relation to changes in variable mortgage interest rates (excluding tracker interest rates). Under these provisions, lenders are now required to provide a Variable Rate Policy Statement to borrowers. This document details to borrowers how their variable interest rate has been set and what factors may result in changes to their variable interest rate.

In addition, when issuing an annual statement of account on the mortgage or when notifying the borrower of a change in their variable mortgage interest rate, a lender must now also provide the borrower with a summary of other available mortgage products that the lender offers that may provide savings for the borrower at that point in time, details of where the borrower can obtain further information on these mortgage products, and the lender is also required to provide a link to the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission's website relating to switching lenders or changing mortgage type.

However, within the regulatory and legal framework which governs residential mortgages and private contracts more generally, the setting and adjustment of variable and other mortgage interest rates will be a contractual and commercial matter for the parties to the mortgage contract. I have no role in relation to the detailed terms of mortgage contracts entered into by individual lenders. However, if a person is not happy with the way a regulated lender is dealing with their mortgage the person can invoke the complaints resolution framework of the Consumer Protection Code and which can include, if necessary, taking the case to the independent Financial Services Ombudsman.

Home Renovation Incentive Scheme Applications

197. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Finance if the rebate due to a person (details supplied) under the home renovation scheme will be paid in full; and the reason for the delay in this payment. [39905/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As regards the Home Renovation Incentive (HRI), relief is given by way of an income tax credit as distinct from a tax rebate. Relief, where it arises, is applied evenly over not less than a two year period. Where a person's income level is such that the person pays no tax in a given two year period, then the person will be unable to claim the relief in that period. However, for the purposes of this relief, where such a person pays income tax in the future then they may be entitled to claim relief at that point. Section 477B(3)(b) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides as follows:

“(b) Insofar as any part of the specified amount cannot be used under paragraph (a) (in this paragraph referred to as ‘excess relief’) due to the insufficiency of income tax charged on the claimant in the two years of assessment following the year of assessment in which the payment or payments referred to in paragraph (a) were made, the income tax for the year of assessment following those two years of assessment and so on for each succeeding year of assessment shall be reduced by the excess relief until the full amount of the excess relief has been used, provided that the amount of the excess relief used in any year of assessment shall not be greater than the amount which reduces the income tax charged on the claimant in that year of assessment to nil.”

I am advised by Revenue that the income of the person concerned and her spouse was below the relevant exempt income threshold for the years 2015 and 2016 and, as a result, no income tax was paid in those years. Accordingly, thus far, there is no income that is not already exempt from tax against which to set any relief.

NAMA Loan Book Value

198. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the par value of the remaining loans held by NAMA; the number of employees NAMA has; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39907/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I would firstly refer the Deputy to my response to Parliamentary Question 94 of 29 June 2017, where I highlighted page 46, in particular, of the 2016 NAMA Annual Report, which outlines that the outstanding principal balance of NAMA's loans and receivables portfolio at end-2016 was €28.4 billion. The corresponding carrying value of loans (net of impairment) held by NAMA at end-2016 was €3.9 billion.

As part of NAMA's impairment process, which takes place on a twice yearly basis, updated information on NAMA's remaining loans will be provided in NAMA's Section 55 Quarterly

Report and Accounts (Quarter 2) 2017, which I expect to be published next month.

In relation to staffing numbers, NAMA advise me that the number of NTMA staff currently assigned to NAMA is 254, including two staff members who are currently on garden leave as part of the agreed retention and redundancy scheme.

NAMA Operations

199. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the redundancy scheme operated by NAMA; the number of staff that availed of the redundancy scheme; the overall cost to the agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39908/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I would refer the Deputy to Dáil Questions No. 64 of June 22, 2017 and No. 273 of May 2, 2017, which outline that the NAMA retention and redundancy scheme was established to help safeguard NAMA's performance, aid the Agency in retaining its operational capabilities through the retention of key staff during the course of its disposal strategy, and allow NAMA to fulfil its objective of maximising value for the State.

Further information on the nature of the scheme was provided by the Department of Finance to the Public Accounts Committee in January 2016, which can be accessed here (see pages 3-8):

www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/committees/pac/correspondence/2016meetings/meeting180-28012016/PAC-R-2078-Correspondence-3A.1---Follow-up-from-Derek-Moran-Dept-Fin-re-meeting-of-03.12.15.pdf

The nature of the redundancy payments has previously been outlined to the Dáil, and is in keeping with established public sector norms; that is, two weeks statutory pay per year of service, capped at €600 per week, plus three additional weeks of base salary per year of service with an overall cap of two years base salary.

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

- have been identified by the NAMA Board as essential to achieving NAMA's objectives;
- be on a specified purpose contract.
- An employee is not eligible if on a permanent contract; has a right of return to the NTMA or is employed by any successor entity of NAMA;
- have a minimum of two year's employment with NAMA at the time of redundancy;
- have maintained a "fully satisfactory" rating or greater for the duration of their employment with NAMA;

and

- remain with NAMA as long as required (Note: an employee will not be paid if (s)he resigns prior to the pre-agreed termination date).

Since the redundancy & retention scheme was approved by the NAMA Board in 2015, I am advised by NAMA that a total of 91 members of staff have been approved for the scheme and have left the employ of NAMA. I am also advised that the 2018 Voluntary Redundancy scheme was advertised in July, and that process is currently ongoing. A breakdown of the costs of the scheme to date is provided in the following table.

Year	Number of employees who exited	Cost
2016	50	€3.6 million
2017	41	€3.9 million

Tax Data

200. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number and percentage of income earners and income tax cases that pay the different rates of income tax; the number and percentage of income earners and income tax cases that pay the different rates of USC, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39913/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that a Pre-Budget 2018 Ready Reckoner is available on the Revenue Statistics webpage at www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/ready-reckoner.pdf.

The statistics contained in this Ready Reckoner are 2018 estimates from the Revenue tax forecasting model using latest actual data for the year 2015, adjusted as necessary for income, self-employment and employment trends in the interim. In relation to the Deputy's Questions, page 3 of the Ready Reckoner shows the information requested on income earners by Income Tax and USC rates in 2018.

Similar information up to 2015 (the most recent year for which tax returns are filed) is available on the Revenue website:

www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/income-distributions/income-earners-it-rate.aspx

and

www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/income-distributions/income-earners-usc-rates.aspx.

Departmental Properties

201. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the Central Mental Hospital site is in the ownership of the Office of Public Works; and if so, the legal framework under which the HSE operates the Central Mental Hospital within a site owned by the Office of Public Works. [39273/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Central Mental Hospital site is in the full ownership of the Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland (CPW). The Health Service Executive (HSE) are in possession of the site under a lease agreement with the CPW.

Departmental Properties

202. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the plans for the Central Mental Hospital site after the transfer of the current facility to the Portrane campus. [39274/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Central Mental Hospital is in the full ownership of the Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland (CPW). The Health Service Executive (HSE) are in possession of the site and I believe that they will move this facility to Portrane in the future.

Once the HSE vacate the site a decision will be made by the CPW on its future use having regard to the requirements of all other state bodies.

Departmental Properties

203. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the level of rent being paid for the Department of Health's new headquarters (details supplied). [39366/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The acquisition of Block 1 of Miesian Plaza is part of OPW's strategy to acquire modern, energy efficient properties that allow for more efficient open plan working environments, the latter being a key part of the ongoing office rationalisation programme for the State's office portfolio. The project is well advanced and will provide office accommodation for the headquarters of the Department of Health, Department of Children and Youth Affairs and accommodation for other Government departments. When completed, the building will provide accommodation for over 950 staff.

The apportioned rental cost for the office space allocated to the Department of Health within Miesian Plaza is €3,312,467 per annum.

Public Sector Staff Redeployment

204. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason an organisation (details supplied) is not on the list of organisations with which his Department allows a transfer of service despite a person giving financial recognition and increments for years of service. [39459/17]

208. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the years of service with an organisation can be recognised as years of service for pension purposes for a person (details supplied); and the reason the organisation is not a member of the public sector transfer network. [39460/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 204 and 208 together.

The Public Sector Transfer Network allows employees to transfer service from one member organisation to another. The legislative provision for this is Section 4 of the Superannuation and Pensions Act 1963, which allows for the transfer of pensionable service in the case of staff transfers between the Civil Service and "approved organisations", and between one "approved organisation" and another. The Act provides that the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform may, by Statutory Instrument, designate an organisation as an "approved organisation" for the purpose of that Section. Membership of the Transfer network is entirely voluntary and or-

ganisations may, if they wish, apply to join provided they have a pension scheme which would be considered compatible with Public Service pension arrangements and could comply with the rules of the Transfer Network. The organisation for which the individual in question works is not currently a member of the Public Service Transfer Network.

Where a person has preserved superannuation benefits with a non-member of the Transfer Network and that scheme is prepared to pay a Transfer Value to the person's current pension scheme, the individual may be credited with service equivalent to the converted service value of the amount received using the purchase of notional service tables. This is a transfer of benefits rather than service so year-for-year credit does not apply. If the organisation in question has a pension scheme and the individual concerned has preserved benefits in the scheme, or indeed in a scheme with any other former employer(s), they might wish to consider pursuing this option.

Waterways Issues

205. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the river at a location (details supplied) will be cleaned. [39141/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The maintenance work on the channel in question will be completed by the end of 2017.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

206. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of a flood protection scheme (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39254/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): I am advised that in July 2017 the Commissioners of Public Works approved funding of €36,000 to Clare County Council (CCC) under the Office of Public Works Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection scheme for the engagement of engineering consultants to progress the detailed design of a project at Cloughaninchy Co Clare. CCC has indicated that the consultant has been appointed and an initial meeting has been held and a programme agreed for the project. It is expected that the detailed design work will be completed this year and CCC will then advance the project through the planning process. The Council will continue to work closely with the local community throughout the process.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

207. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of a flood protection scheme (details supplied) in County Clare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39270/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): At the Office of Public Works' (OPW) request, the consultants on the Shannon CFRAM study carried out a review of the options for addressing the flooding problem in Clonlara. This review has identified an outline viable solution, which is now included in the draft Flood Risk Management Plan for this area.

Clare County Council (CCC) has requested approval to advance a detailed project-level assessment and design for this outline solution. The OPW has responded to the Council, agreeing to the detailed study being progressed by the Council and has agreed to fund the costs of the study. Should the detailed study find that the project is technically, economically and environmentally viable then the project will be considered for further advancement, with planning and construction to be undertaken by the Council.

The Council has informed the OPW that it is due to make a formal submission to the OPW shortly setting out its estimate of costs and requirements for funding related to the engagement of consultants to carry out the project-assessment and design.

If following this more detailed project-level assessment, the project is confirmed to be feasible, the Council is to revert to the OPW for approval to advance the works through planning and implementation, with funding from the OPW.

Question No. 208 answered with Question No. 204.

Office of Public Works Properties

209. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the OPW will take back possession of the car park for the new Drogheda courthouse; if the OPW will expedite discussions with Louth County Council to ensure that the car park can be made open to the public on non-sitting court days (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39670/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): I am advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that the site in question is currently in the ownership of the Courts Service and that the legal transfer of the site to the Commissioners is at an advanced stage.

The Commissioners further advise that the future use of this site is under active consideration for alternative State use and that OPW officials have engaged in dialogue with the Local Authority with a view to determining the future use of the site.

Garda Station Closures

210. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if premises (details supplied) could be leased to a local youth group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39894/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): As part of the Programme for a Partnership Government, the Policing Authority was asked to oversee a review of closed Garda stations with a view to reopening some of these and the Policing Authority are currently carrying out the review. The outcome of the review, which has yet to be completed, may impact on any decision that the Commissioners of Public Works reach with regard to the future use of this property.

The policy of the Office of Public Works (OPW) with regard to non-operational (vacant) State property, including the former Garda station at Bawnboy, Co. Cavan is to:

1. Identify if the property is required/suitable for alternative State use by either Government Departments or the wider public sector.

2. If there is no other State use identified for a property, the OPW will then consider disposing of the property on the open market if and when conditions prevail, in order to generate revenue for the Exchequer.

3. If no State requirement is identified or if a decision is taken not to dispose of a particular property, the OPW may consider community involvement (subject to a detailed written submission, which would indicate that the community/voluntary group has the means to insure, maintain and manage the property and that there are no ongoing costs for the Exchequer).

I am advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that the future use of the property is currently being considered in line with OPW stated policy and, upon completion of this review, a decision will be made.

The Commissioners of Public Works continually engage with key Local Authority stakeholders and other State Bodies to ensure that property is not disposed of when it might be deemed suitable for alternative State use.

Student Grant Scheme Expenditure

211. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to increase student funding over the next four years to at least the average rate of other high income western European EU countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39052/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): There are significant differences between EU countries in terms of the level of public expenditure allocated to higher education and the types of direct and indirect supports given to students and private households.

The student support system adopted in each EU country generally involves a combination of either grants (needs based grants and/or merit based grants), loans, tax benefits and/or family allowances. For example, in Ireland we provide grant support to circa 45% of full-time undergraduate students. By comparison, there are no needs-based grants available to students in England. Instead support to cover the costs of attending college, is provided via student loans.

In 2017, my Department will invest almost €450m in access measures to assist students from under-represented groups to participate in and complete higher education.

The principal support is the student grant scheme, which makes available means-tested financial assistance to students in further and higher education. Under the terms of the scheme, grant assistance is awarded to students on full-time courses who meet the prescribed conditions of funding including those relating to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment and means. It is anticipated that the scheme will benefit circa 80,000 students in 2017/18. Other key supports include the Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities.

In Budget 2017, I secured additional funding of €36.5m for the higher education sector, as part of a €160m three year funding package. This includes €8.5m for access measures, including the reintroduction of postgraduate maintenance grants for the most disadvantaged students. This additional money will allow the sector keep pace with demographic increases and introduce targeted initiatives in areas such as disadvantage, skills, research and flexible learning. Among those who will benefit from the additional third level funding being made available are students from disadvantaged backgrounds, lone parents, and Travellers.

Proposals to develop a more sustainable funding model for the higher education system are contained in the Cassells report that is currently being considered by the Oireachtas Joint

Committee on Education and Skills. I referred the Cassells report to the Joint Committee in order to build political consensus around the most appropriate future funding model for higher education.

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

National Risk Assessment

212. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the role his Department has in co-ordinating Departments' responses to the risks outlined in the national assessment report on risks, particularly in view of the fact that they apply to the risks outlined in the report in relation to human capital and skills needs and in view of the fact they are deemed to be issues of growing importance in the report; the areas the Government will address; and the way in which it will address same. [39103/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Risk Assessment process was initiated in 2013 when the Government announced it would publish annually a National Risk Assessment (NRA), as a process to identify the strategic risks that Ireland faces over the short, medium and long term. The Department of the Taoiseach co-ordinates the preparation of the NRA supported by a Steering Group of Government Departments and Agencies. The first report was published in 2014 and the fourth most recently on 29 August 2017. The National Risk Assessment process involves several stages, including collaboration with Government Departments and Agencies, and open public consultation. This exercise is not intended to replicate or displace the detailed risk management that is already conducted within government departments and agencies. Nor does it impact on the responsibilities of Government Ministers and Departments to consider and implement actions to mitigate risks arising in policy areas under their remit. Rather, it aims to provide a systematic overview of strategic risks facing the country and to assist in ensuring appropriate prevention and mitigation measures are introduced by the relevant Departments/Agencies as needed.

My Department launched the National Skills Strategy 2025 in January 2016. The Strategy identifies Ireland's current skills profile, provides a strategic vision and specific objectives for Ireland's future skills requirements, and sets out a road map for how the vision and objectives can be achieved across the education and training sector. With over 140 Actions, the Strategy sets out the Government's commitment to improving and using skills for sustainable economic growth and outlines how we can develop a well-skilled, adaptable workforce. Implementation of the Strategy is a cross-cutting issue, which requires the co-operation of many different stakeholders. In addition to the responsibilities of Government Departments and agencies, employers and individuals also have their own parts to play in the implementation of the strategy.

Included in the actions in the Strategy is the creation of a new National Skills Council. The Council, which was established in April 2017, will oversee research and advise on prioritisation and delivery of responses to identified skills needs. Skills information from the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs in DBEI (EGFSN), the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit in Solas (SLMRU) and the Regional Skills Fora will feed into the work of the Council.

School Transport Provision

213. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review the school transport of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39592/17]

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 a service will be extended to accommodate the child in question this week.

Departmental Agencies Data

214. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the names of all persons who served as chairperson and ordinary members of FÁS from 2012 until its dissolution; the amount of remuneration, travel and subsistence paid to each person from 2012 until its dissolution; if persons who are public servants received remuneration in breach of the one person one salary rule; if he plans to recover such payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39864/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): Details of all persons who served as chairperson and ordinary members of the Board of FÁS during 2012 and 2013 including remuneration and travel and subsistence paid in respect of attendance at Board meetings are attached. In relation to the one person one salary rule, this was implemented as soon as practicable having regard to individual Board members warrants of appointment already in place.

Fees and Expenses paid to Board members

In accordance with the requirements of Paragraph 12.1 (iv) of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, fees and expenses paid to the Board in the year ended 31st December, 2012 were as follows:

	2012	2012	2012
	€	€	€
	Fees	Travel & Subsistence	Total
Michael Dempsey (Chairman)	20,520	0	20,520
Paul O'Toole (Director General)	0	0	0
Tony Dempsey	11,970	0	11,970
Emer Gilvarry	11,970	0	11,970
Martin Hogan	11,970	78	12,048
Annette Hughes	11,970	0	11,970
Paddy McDonagh	0	0	0
Michael Moriarty	11,970	223	12,193

	2012	2012	2012
Brendan Murphy	11,970	1,121	13,091
Seán O Longáin	11,970	11	11,981
Margaret Sweeney	11,970	0	11,970
Total	116,280	1,433	117,713

Fees and Expenses paid to Board members

In accordance with the requirements of Paragraph 12.1 (iv) of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, fees and expenses paid to the Board in the period ended 26 October 2013 were as follows:

	2013	2013	2013
	€	€	€
	Fees	Travel & Subsistence	Total
Michael Dempsey (Chairperson)	16,850	0	16,850
Paul O Toole (Director General)	0	0	0
Tony Dempsey *	676	0	676
Emer Gilvarry	9,830	0	9,830
Martin Hogan *	676	50	726
Annette Hughes	9,830	0	9,830
Brendan Murphy	0	309	309
Seán O Longáin	9,830	288	10,118
Margaret Sweeney	9,830	0	9,830
Paddy McDonagh	0	0	0
Michael Moriarty	9,830	0	9,830
John McKeon (appointed 30 January 2013)	0	0	0
Total	67,352	647	67,999

* Term of office concluded on 21 January 2013

School Transport Administration

215. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the €160 million paid by his Department to Bus Éireann in 2017 in view of the fact that no service level agreement is in place (details supplied); his plans to put in place a service level agreement; his further plans to ensure proper governance structures are put in place and value for this expenditure is achieved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39090/17]

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 Summary of Accounting Arrangements relating to the Transport Scheme for Primary and Post-Primary School Children dated 1 January 1975 remains the current arrangement for payments to Bus Éireann.

My Department has financial oversight of the operation of the school transport scheme and is finalising a Service Level Agreement with Bus Éireann. This Service Level Agreement will build on existing processes in relation to the administration and operation of the Scheme.

Departmental Funding

216. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 345 of 26 July 2017, if he will provide a copy of the most recent year end report to his Department in respect of funding provided to Enterprise Ireland outlining its activities and utilisation of this funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39108/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): During 2016 Enterprise Ireland (EI) spent €7.8 million on training activities during 2016. The National Training Fund contribution to funding these activities was €3.5 million with the balance of support coming from exchequer funding from the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. Enterprise Ireland provides management development and training supports for Irish enterprise.

The end of year reports received for the supported programmes are listed in the following table.

Outline - CMD Programmes 2016	Number attendees	Target Audience	Training Provided	Programme outputs
LEADERSHIP 4 GROWTH- Leadership 4 Growth was designed for CEO's of Enterprise Ireland client companies to address key barriers to scale by developing and enhancing the leadership ambition and mind-set of CEO's to help them to create companies that achieve dominant market positions.	28	CEO's and their senior teams	This development programme blends together leading international institutions (IMD, Switzerland - 2015) and also implements one to one leadership coaching, cohort networks of CEO's with locally based Business Advisers and VC's and practitioners from international business.	The CEO's and their senior teams work through assignments in relation to the challenges and opportunities facing their companies. The programme has achieved significant results over the past ten years and a new programme is being rolled out in the coming months

Outline - CMD Programmes 2016	Number attendees	Target Audience	Training Provided	Programme outputs
<p>INNOVATION 4 GROWTH</p> <p>Innovation 4 Growth is specifically designed to meet the needs of ambitious and entrepreneurial Irish companies seeking to unlock opportunities in the marketplace</p>	<p>57 Phase I / 27 Phase II</p>	<p>Management Teams</p>	<p>This development programme fast-tracks companies through an end-to-end innovation learning and practice journey. The programme supports the delivery for each participating company of one or more innovation initiatives.</p>	<p>Programme participants are assigned a business adviser coach for the duration of the programme who supports the development of each company's innovative initiative from development through to execution.</p>
<p>MANAGEMENT 4 GROWTH / PLATFORM 4 GROWTH</p> <p>Platform 4 Growth is a management development programme specifically to challenge SME's to scale and to support client companies that are serious about growing their business</p>	<p>330 Individuals/110 Companies</p>	<p>SME's and client companies who want to expand their business</p>	<p>This development programme offers a combination of e-learning and face to face delivery through networking events.</p>	<p>A flexible way for SME's to undertake capability development that meets their specific requirements at a given time</p>

Outline - CMD Programmes 2016	Number attendees	Target Audience	Training Provided	Programme outputs
<p>HPSU Founders Forum (formally known as ACCELERATE) The HPSU Founders Forum is designed for High Potential Start-Up companies. HPSU's Accelerate was launched in October 2015 and continuing through 2016 helps companies to focus on the execution of their business plan.</p>	<p>81</p>	<p>High Potential Start-Up companies (from a pipeline of high growth companies - HPSU's)</p>	<p>This programme helps companies that are post investment HPSU's to accelerate their start-up and growth phases.</p>	<p>Accelerate helps companies reach sales as quickly as possible.</p>
<p>SPRINT One to one coaching is provided along with training to help companies to become investor ready</p>	<p>50</p>	<p>High Potential Start-Up companies (from a pipeline of high growth companies - HPSU's)</p>	<p>Designed for pre-investment HPSUS and piloted in September 2015 this programme helps companies to focus on their product market fit.</p>	<p>Training helps companies to become investor ready.</p>

Outline - CMD Programmes 2016	Number attendees	Target Audience	Training Provided	Programme outputs
<p>International Selling Programme</p> <p>The International Selling Programme is Enterprise Ireland's flagship programme designed to equip Irish companies with necessary tools to reach their export sales and potential in global markets</p>	165	<p>Internationally focused SME's. Applicants should typically spend a minimum of 30% of time in a sales role and must be at the level of MD or CEO or alternatively - Sales, Commercial or Marketing Director or other director level.</p>	<p>Companies develop an international growth plan aligned to overall business strategy and growth targets. Participants are also assigned a Business Adviser helping to implement programme learnings and to have an immediate impact on the participants' sales ability.</p>	<p>This practical programme delivers a real and immediate impact on the company's ability to access new markets and grow export sales practitioner who works as a Business Adviser</p>
<p>Excel at Export Selling (Short Programme < 100 hours)</p> <p>In parallel to the International Selling Programme and as a complementary offer, a series of workshops called Excel at Export Selling aims to rapidly embed into companies the proven tools of best international practice in selling.</p>	145	<p>Client companies across all industry sectors who need to upskill for export growth. The Excel suite of one day workshops gives access to selling skills development in a practical and user friendly format.</p>	<p>The Excel at Export Selling suite of programmes maintains a focus on the three fundamental building blocks of successful international selling: developing a compelling customer value proposition, following a systematic and repeatable sales process and executing a well defined route to market strategy.</p>	<p>Each workshop is tailored to deal with the practical needs of the clients with various aspects of sales. Individual follow-up sessions with expert facilitators maximise the impact of the workshops and help companies implement learnings.</p>

Outline - CMD Programmes 2016	Number attendees	Target Audience	Training Provided	Programme outputs
<p>Exploring Exporting (Short Programme &lt; 100 hours)</p> <p>This is a series of workshops that focuses on helping first-time exporter companies to become export ready.</p>	<p>57 companies and 82 attendees</p>	<p>CEO/MD/Senior managers in client company SMEs that are looking to decide whether exporting is the right move for their business or not. Also includes LEO's</p>	<p>Training modules include: conducting market research; defining of export value proposition; process of exporting</p>	<p>Become export ready. Business mentors are available to work with the companies to identify any issues or barriers to becoming export ready. This builds confidence and capability for first time exporters as they enter new overseas markets.</p>
<p>ACCESS SILICON VALLEY</p> <p>This programme consists of a three day Boot Camp followed by a ten day itinerary to the Silicon Valley</p>	<p>35</p>	<p>CEOs / Founders / Management Teams from High Potential Start-up companies with a US focus and a live product or service / companies with an innovative product or services that wish to gain market entry to USA and are capable of creating at least 10 jobs and achieving €1M in sales within 3 - 5 years of start-up.</p>	<p>Clients learn to develop their pitching and presentation skills during the Boot Camp. A ten day visit to the Silicon Valley is offered to successful client companies. During that visit there is one-to-one mentoring from industry relevant mentors. This programme takes place bi-annually.</p>	<p>Clients develop market entry strategies relevant the "West Coast Marketplace" and learn about the differences involved in doing business in that region.</p>

Outline - CMD Programmes 2016	Number attendees	Target Audience	Training Provided	Programme outputs
Graduates for International Growth (G4IG)	18	Companies that wish to recruit a graduate - the graduate is focused on making a lasting impact in overseas markets.	G4IG supports ambitious internationally trading companies by matching the skills of a graduate and providing the company with a structured means of acquiring new skills in international business.	Graduates with potential will be the next generation of business development executives and are matched with ambitious internationally trading companies.
Enterprise Ireland Mentor Network was established to help companies identify and solve obstacles to growth	468	Client companies across all industry sectors who require tailored advice, guidance and support to help them accelerate growth and build management capability.	Mentors are senior executives drawn from the private sector with a proven track record in business.	Mentors act as a confidential sounding board to advise the company on key operational and strategic issues. The network is regularly refreshed with CEO's and executives with high levels of achievement in marketing, strategy, organisation development and R&D.

Lean Transform - Part of the Lean Business Offer

Programme Description and Outline of Activities

The Lean transform programme is the third of a three part response offered to Enterprise Ireland clients in an effort to support their competitiveness building activities. The Lean programme trains management and staff in client companies to improve their capability and capacity to improve their operations. The offer is targeted to address all areas of operations from design through production to delivery and logistics. Client projects have improved operational performance across the key areas of their business, across all the key sectors represented by Enterprise Ireland Clients.

The supported activities relate to the training of management and staff and conclude formal training activities, best practice study activities, network engagement with other like-minded companies who are challenging to improve their competitiveness. Training is delivered

by trainers who are registered on the Enterprise Ireland Directory of Lean Service Providers. Trainers have to meet defined criteria before they are registered on the Directory.

The IDA and Udaras na Gaeltachta have adopted the Lean Programme to support their clients on their competitiveness improvement journeys. Twenty of the LEO offices have adopted a Lean Start offer for their clients.

Participant Numbers, Target Audience Training Provided

To date 899 projects have been supported under the full Lean Business offer with 118 projects supported under the transform level support. The programme targets both management and staff and is focused on developing their capabilities to use and understand Lean tools and principles. The fundamental of the training provided is to give people the core tools and techniques of Lean to help them identify and address issues within their own processes. A list of the key elements of training provided is presented in the appendix.

Programme Outputs

The programme has proven effective based on analysis carried out by Technopolis for the DJEI. Improvements of 20% in productivity and 11% in employment, counterfactually measured against those who had not participated in the Lean programme have been identified by Technopolis.

Udaras Na Gaeltachta and IDA report similar results to those achieved by Enterprise Ireland clients.

Appendix

Indicative training provided under Lean Transform Programme

- Introduction to Lean for Management and Staff– White belt/Yellow Belt training
- Lean Leadership - Strategy and Deployment
- Process Mapping/Value Stream Mapping
- Five S- Organisation and Order
- Practical Problem Solving
- Check Sheets
- Run Charts
- Visualisation
- Teams and Team Building
- Green Belt Training (Possible Black Belt Training) for key people
- Focus on environmental sustainability, possible appointment of Green champion, ISO 14000, ISO 50001
- Qualitative and Quantitative benchmarking exercise post approval by IC to provide solid basis for impact assessment.

e-Marketing Improvement Assignments

Programme description and outline of activities

Under the Business Process Improvement Grant, client companies can apply for grant support to undertake an e-Marketing Improvement Assignment. This support is designed to assist senior managers in client companies to maximise the opportunities presented by the Internet as a business development channel.

Information on participant numbers, target audience, training provided etc.

The programme was launched in May 2012 replacing the eBusiness Management Initiative which ran from 2006 to 2012. The e-Marketing Assignment support is targeted at manufacturing and International Services companies (excluding HPSU's) and is focused on helping export-focused clients across all Industry sectors to exploit the Internet as a route to market. To date a total of 240 companies have been approved funding support totalling €4.5m. In 2016 a total 44 clients companies were approved support to the value of €0.9m.

Through the use of one-to-one training and action-based learning, consultants/ trainers will work with clients to plan and implement significant strategic e-marketing projects.

Programme outputs

The e-Marketing Improvement assignment is specifically designed to develop and enhance Client Company's capability to use the internet as an effective channel for export business development. A typical assignment would strive to achieve the following outcomes;

- Strategic review of existing online activities and development of your company's future online strategy.
- Understanding international best practice, effective tools and strategies in the area of e-Marketing.
- Embedding e-marketing practices and skills in your company by developing the capabilities of your staff.

Clients who apply for support must complete an eMaturity questionnaire both pre and post assignment. These questionnaires are used to benchmark knowledge and capabilities achieved.

Departmental Funding

217. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 345 of 26 July 2017, the reason there are different arrangements in place with organisations that receive funding from his Department; the reason there is not a standard service level agreement in place to ensure a consistency of governance in relation to spending in view of the fact that there are various types of agreements in place by his Department with different organisations (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39109/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Departmental funding is disbursed in line with the overall principle that there should be transparency and accountability in the management of public money having regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness and in compliance with the central guidelines, as set out in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Circular number 13 of 2014.

The Department provides funding to a range of bodies, which differ in their relationships, roles and responsibilities to the Department, as well as their compliance obligations, reporting

procedures and assurances arrangements, including some bodies whose primary oversight relationship is with other Government Departments.

Circular 13 of 2014 acknowledges that, given the diversity of bodies in receipt of public funding, a standardised service level agreement may not be appropriate in all cases and so provides that “content and the extent of the agreement [covering resources and outputs] is a matter for the Department having regard to the nature of the grant, and agreements will vary depending on the size and complexity of the Body’s operations.” In cases where there are multiple donors or where the donating Vote is not the supervisory authority, accounting may be “governed by global governance structures and other arrangements”, provided the Department is satisfied that there are appropriate monitoring and control arrangements in place.

More widely, the Department is undertaking significant efforts to further develop and implement robust and consistent governance arrangements across the education sector. The aim is to ensure that utilisation of public funds is achieved within a framework of high standards of performance, accountability, compliance and oversight.

A Management Board Committee on Sectoral Governance and Accountability, which is chaired by the Secretary General, was established in 2015. This committee provides overall guidance on the enhancement of governance arrangements across the education sector. It is supported by a Sectoral Governance unit which has been established in the Department which undertakes work to support the enhancement and standardisation of governance and accountability oversight across the Department. This has included rolling out of the first phase of a programme of governance compliance reviews involving the Department’s non-commercial bodies.

Departmental Funding

218. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 345 of 26 July 2017, if he will provide a copy of the most recent year end report to his department in respect of funding provided to the IDA outlining its activities and utilisation of this funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39110/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): €3m was paid to the IDA from the National Training Fund in 2016. The 2016 report on activity is provided. It should be noted that the IDA Training Grants Programme is also supported through exchequer funding from the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

Training Grants to Industry – IDA Ireland

-	2016 €000	2015 €000	2014 €000	2013 €000	2012 €000
Estimate Provision	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000
Out-turn	3,000	3000	3,000	3,000	3,000
Surplus /Shortfall	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
% Variation as a percentage of Allocation	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

The Training Grant programme aims to facilitate a significant upgrade of the skills base of a company. Staff training is viewed as a mechanism to continuously improve a company’s long term competitiveness. Training supports are a key element of IDA’s Transformation Agenda.

Main Objectives and Impacts of Companies availing of Training Grants:

In 2013 Forfás carried out an evaluation of IDA Training Grants and found that the main objectives of companies in availing of training grants are:

- (i) to alleviate skills deficits;
- (ii) to introduce new processes or new products; and
- (iii) to raise value added.

Companies ranked the following as the main impacts of the grant:

- (i) improved competitiveness;
- (ii) increased productivity;
- (iii) increased Irish status in the company globally; and
- (iv) improved sustainability in Ireland.

In each year 2016, 2015 and 2014 IDA was allocated a grant of €3m from the National Training Fund. In each year training grants were paid over and above the NTF allocation of €3m and were funded from grant provided by DJEI to IDA.

NTF	2016	2015	2014
Grants Paid	€9.718m	€8.807m	€5.044m
Companies Supported	34	44	32
No. of Trainees	9,627	8,600	7,400

Departmental Funding

219. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of funding his Department allocates to Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board on an annual basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39155/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In 2016, my Department provided funding totalling over €65 million to Limerick and Clare ETB.

This figure includes funding for the pay of certain ETB staff (including teachers), funding for the day-to-day running of schools, specific grants (e.g. book grant, transition year programme), targeted expenditure (e.g. DEIS funding), funding for student grants, funding for capital projects (which can vary from year to year depending on number of projects) and also ETB head office running costs.

The corresponding figure for 2017 is almost €69 million. This figure may be subject to change as the year evolves.

It should be noted that ETBs also receive funding from sources other than my Department, for example through self-financing programmes or from other Departments and agencies, most notably for further education and training which is funded by SOLAS.

The annual accounts for each ETB provide detailed information on funding from all sources and how it was used. These accounts, when finalised and audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General, are published on the Oireachtas website.

School Accommodation

220. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number and location of all vacant schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39195/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The majority of school buildings are in private ownership.

Where a school relocates or closes, the future use of the old building is a matter for the property owner. In general where former schools are not required for educational use, such properties may be used for community or other purposes or may be sold. Therefore whereas the Department holds details of schools which have closed, it does not hold details of current usage.

Site Acquisitions

221. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the building unit within his Department will consider buying a permanent site in the city of Limerick as a matter of urgency to house Limerick education centre (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39205/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Limerick Education Centre is situated in a building owned by Limerick and Clare ETB. My Department is aware of some concerns in relation to current accommodation arrangements at the Centre and my officials are working with the Centre’s Management Committee to find an appropriate solution as soon as possible. No proposal has been received for the purchase of a new site.

The network of Education Centres consists of 21 full time and 9 part time centres. Their principal activity is to facilitate the local delivery of national programmes of teacher professional development on behalf of my Department. They also organise a varied local programme of activities for teachers, school management and parents in response to demand. Each Centre has a Management Committee which is elected annually to manage the business of the staff and the centre.

Higher Education Institutions

222. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has requested an analysis of the status of research infrastructure within higher education institutes, HEIs; his plans for reviewing and funding strategic development plans in the HEIs; if he has carried out an analysis of the impact on HEIs of the potential withdrawal of UK HEIs from EU funding programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39207/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Subject to the availability of funding, capital investment priorities for this Department in the higher education sector will include the upgrade and expansion of higher education facilities, taking account of demographic pressures, skills needs in the economy, regional development and opportunities for life-long learning. Capital funding for research is managed by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

In addition, my Department allocates recurrent funding to the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for direct disbursement to the HEA designated higher education institutions. The HEA allocates this funding to the institutions and it is a matter for each higher education institution to

allocate the recurrent exchequer funding it receives in order to meet the needs of the institution.

In relation to Brexit, the potential impact of that development is being assessed within my Department and across Government. The potential impact of Brexit on UK/Ireland research collaboration and partnerships between education institutions and enterprise, as well as the implications for EU funding for research have been identified by the Education and Research Subgroup of the Economy and Trade Working Group, and raised at my Department's higher education consultation forum in December 2016. My Department's consideration of the most appropriate response to potential developments is ongoing.

Research collaboration between Irish and UK research teams on EU funded projects has been extensive and mutually beneficial. In terms of collaborative links the UK is our largest collaborator under Horizon 2020. In the period 2012-16 there were almost 13,000 co-authored papers between Irish and UK researchers, significantly ahead of collaborations with other states. Under the EU's Research Framework Programme 7, 72% of the total Irish drawdown was for projects involving a UK partner.

The Government will seek to maintain to the greatest extent possible existing East-West and North-South research collaboration. There may also be new research opportunities for Ireland as a remaining member of the EU and participant in Horizon 2020 and its successor programme, to build new collaborations with 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 and will continue to engage with our education and research sector in this regard. To that end a joint stakeholder dialogue on research with the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation is planned to take place in the Autumn.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

223. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a person (details supplied) in County Galway was not offered a school place in Galway city and has to travel every day to school in Athenry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39238/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): 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 3 are ASD classes at post-primary level in Galway City and 11 are ASD post-primary classes in Galway County.

While it is not always possible to ensure that a special class placement will be available in a student's local school, 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.

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. The NCSE has informed my Department that they have approached a number of schools in the area referred to by the Deputy to open classes.

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

Parents/guardians of children with special needs who may need advice should contact their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO). The local SENO contact details are available on www.ncse.ie.

As the Deputy's question relates to the placement options for a particular child, I have referred the question to the NCSE for their consideration and direct reply.

Apprenticeship Data

224. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprentices in block laying, plastering and bricklaying that commenced their apprenticeships in each of the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39239/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The information sought by the Deputy is set out in the following table.

As the Deputy can see from the information provided Apprenticeship was one of the greatest casualties of the recession. Between 2006 and 2010 the number of apprentice registrations collapsed from 693 to 22. The number has no increased from 16 in 2011 to 70 in 2016. The end August 2017 figure is 58% ahead of the same point last year.

Apprentice Registrations

Sector	Craft	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
		Dec	YTD Aug											
Con- struc- tion	Brick & Stone- laying	473	247	57	20	10	11	6	3	20	26	52	39	964
	Plas- tering	220	143	57	14	12	5	4	8	9	7	18	26	523
	Total	693	390	114	34	22	16	10	11	29	33	70	65	1,487

Fire Safety Regulations

225. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when his attention was drawn to fire safety concerns in schools (details supplied); the actions being taken to rectify this situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39240/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): On 1 September my Department announced that it is publishing a public tender notice on the Governments e-tenders website to commission fire safety audits of a representative sample of up to 25 schools constructed over the last 20 years.

The tender for appointment of fire safety consultants will be completed by the mid October. It is expected that the first set of Fire Safety Audit Reports will be provided to the Department by the end of December 2017.

This is part of a process being undertaken as an added precaution by the Department of Education and Skills, prompted by recent concerns in Ireland and abroad regarding fire safety in public buildings. It is intended to give the Department a clear picture of whether there are any issues arising in respect of compliance with fire safety certificates in school building projects completed in the past 20 years or currently under construction.

On 1st September my Department also published fire safety reports for five school buildings constructed in 2008, including the school in question, where issues had been identified in respect of the compliance with their fire safety certificates.

These Fire safety reports were completed in July 2016. The findings of the 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 that 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.

It is also important to note that in the case of each of the schools, the Department has engaged extensively with the Fire Officers of the relevant Local Authorities. The Fire Officers have broadly welcomed the Department's proactive approach to dealing with the issues highlighted and have indicated their acceptance of the course of action being followed by the Department, including the identified remediation works and the fact that the schools continue to be occupied on a day-to-day basis.

The background to the Fire Safety Reports has been outlined in the Press Statement on 1 September with the publication of the report. In October 2015, following the issues that arose in respect of Rush/Lusk ETNS, the Department made arrangements for the procurement of fire safety inspections of the five schools constructed in 2008.

A Consultant was appointed to carry out the fire inspection audits of the schools. The initial fire safety investigations were carried out in January 2016. Draft Fire Reports were prepared in March 2016. In order to complete the reports it was necessary for the Fire Consultant to gather further information on the buildings including compliance reports, drawings etc. and to conduct further investigations and site visits. The Final Reports were received in July 2016.

The Department met with WBS and their Architectural Consultant in June 2016. It was agreed at the meeting that WBS would liaise with the Departments Consultant's and would carry out the required works in the relevant schools.

In August 2016 WBS advised that the priority works (i.e. immediate essential improvement works) had been carried out at the schools. Despite a number of requests by the Department, photographic reports and commentary on the works were sought following the works in August but information was not received until late September and early October 2016. The Department's Consultant issued a commentary on the information to WBS on 25th November 2016 expressing concerns.

In January 2017 the Department's Project Managers advised WBS that following their reports in relation to the remedial works at the schools, commentary received from the Fire Con-

sultant had suggested that the reports provided did not address the original Fire Consultant reports in their entirety. They were requested to provide reference photographs for each item deemed to be attended to and for any items not yet completed to include a reason for not addressing and a proposed date for attending to same.

Further site visits to the schools were carried out by the Fire Consultant in March/April 2017. This was a visual inspection of the previously advised completed items by the Fire Consultant. The Draft Report which was received from the Fire Consultant in May 2017 following this visit concluded that very little upgrade works which were previously advised had actually been carried out. Where works were carried out they were not to a satisfactory standard and there were issues identified within the Fire Consultant's report of July 2016 which had not been addressed.

While it had been the Department's understanding that WBS had carried out the works in summer 2016 which had been highlighted in the Fire Consultant reports as being most urgent and important, it became apparent following review by the Fire Consultant that this was not in fact the case.

On 5 May 2017 the Department met with WBS to discuss the findings of the reports of May 2017. WBS committed to visiting the schools in week commencing 8th May to review.

Since that date the progress in respect of the schools in question is as follows.

On 12th May 2017, the Department and its Consultants along with Consultants representing WBS met with the relevant Fire Officer, to discuss the schools. Copies of the Fire consultant reports were provided. The Fire Officer was advised of the project to build larger permanent schools to replace the temporary schools by the end of 2018.

A detailed proposal on works proposed and conformity on the compartmentation of the building was submitted to the Fire Officer by Western Building Systems Fire Safety Consultant on 8th August.

Remediation works on the Fire Doors commenced on Tuesday 29th August. WBS has confirmed that the remedial works to all fire doors in both schools was completed by Wednesday 30th August.

WBS further advised the Department that the enhancements to the fire stopping and the remedial work required to the fire collar fixings as well as the intumescent paint works would be carried out as weekend works in September.

The current position is that works have now been completed and arrangements are being made for the works to be inspected jointly by the Department's and WBS Consultants and a report will be submitted to the Fire Officer.

Regarding the schools new permanent accommodation, the building project for this is at tender stage. The tender assessment report has been received in the Department and is currently under review.

Gaelscoil Issues

226. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department carried out a study on the establishment of a support centre within his Department to enable the transition of English medium schools to Irish medium schools; if he will provide the results of

such a study; if there is an established protocol within his Department for such a procedure; if he will make these guidelines available if such a protocol exists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39241/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has no proposals to carry out a study in relation to the establishment of a support centre for Irish language medium education at this time. However, the Deputy may be aware that, in the context of the Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity process which I announced in January this year, my Department is working to provide more multi-denominational and non-denominational schools across the country, in line with the choices of families and school communities. In devising this roadmap to accelerate the transfer of patronage in order to increase the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools, I propose to concentrate on the reconfiguration of existing school provision. The new plans are designed to provide additional multidenominational schools in either of the nation's languages, Irish or English and I envisage that the possibility of some English medium schools seeking to make a transition to Irish medium may occur in that context. My Department is currently working with the relevant education partners in drawing up protocols to govern the identification and implementation phases of the process. Once these have been completed, further development of procedures such as those mentioned by the Deputy will be undertaken to support the process.

Oideachas Gaeltachta

227. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den an Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna an mbeidh an clár dátheangach um Thacaíocht Naisc (Droichead) á chur ar fáil d'iar-bhunscoileanna gaeltachta ar bhonn píolótach; más rud é go mbeidh, cathain a chuirfear ar fáil é; cá mhéad scoil a bhfuil an roinn ag súil leis go mbeidh siad páirteach sa chlár sna trí bliana atá romhainn; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [39244/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Is é ceann de na gníomhartha atá ainmnithe sa *Pholasáí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022* ná triail phíolótach a dhéanamh ar chlár leasaithe 'Naisc' (Droichead) in dhá iar-bhunscoil Ghaeltachta a chuireann teagasc iomlán ar fáil trí Ghaeilge, chun tacú le haistriú na scoláirí T2 go hoideachas iomlán trí mheán na Gaeilge. Tá na gníomhartha sa Pholasáí á gcur i bhfeidhm ar bhonn céimnithe ar feadh tréimshe cúig bliana an Pholasáí. Cé go bhfuil dul chun cinn suntasach déanta ag mo Roinn maidir le cur i bhfeidhm an Pholasáí go dtí seo, níl aon chinneadh déanta maidir le cathain a chuirfear tús leis an gelár Droichead a chur ar fáil d'iarbhunscoileanna ar bhonn píolótach.

Oideachas Gaeltachta

228. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den an Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cén dul chun cinn atá déanta ag an rialtas maidir le háiteanna a sholáthar do 30 mínteoir iar-bhunscoile breise in aghaidh na bliana ó 2018/2019 mar atá leagtha amach sa pholasáí don oideachas gaeltachta; cén soláthraí OTM atá roghnaithe acu leis na háiteanna a chur ar fáil; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [39248/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Is ceann de príomhspricanna an Pholasáí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022 é feabhas a chur ar cháilíocht an teagaisc trí Ghaeilge. Is é ceann de na gníomhartha atá ainmnithe sa *Pholasáí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022* i leith na príomhsprice sin ná láidriú ar sholáthar na mínteoirí ón soláthraí Oideachas Tosaigh Mínteoirí atá ann cheana trí áiteanna a sholáthar do 30 mínteoir

iarbhunscoile breise in aghaidh na bliana ó 2018/19.

Tá dul chun cinn déanta ag mo Roinn chun soláthar líon na múinteoirí iar-bhunscoile atá in ann teagasc trí mheán na Gaeilge a láidriú tríd na socrúithe atá déanta chun dhá phost iar-bhunscoile ar iasacht a sholáthar don Mháistreacht Ghairmiúil Oideachais in Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh. Tá sé i gceist go gcuirfidh na poist bhreise seo ó Mheán Fómhair 2017 ar aghaidh, le soláthar na múinteoirí iar-bhunscoile trí raon de bhearta lena n-áirítear uasoiliúint ábhar oidí agus deiseanna for-rochtana, ar líne agus foghlaim chumaisc, chomh maith leis an gclár a neartú agus a chur chun tosaigh.

Tá mo Roinn ag obair leis an Oifig um Sholáthar Rialtais chun próiseas iomaíochta tairsceana a réachtáil do dhearadh agus do sholáthar clár B.Ed. Oideachas Tosaigh Múinteoirí (OTM) nua trí mheán na Gaeilge agus do chlár iarchéime trí mheán na Gaeilge do mhúinteoirí bunscoile agus iar-bhunscoile ionas gur féidir an soláthar múinteoirí bunscoile agus iar-bhunscoile atá in ann oideachas lán-Ghaeilge ar ardchaighdeán a mhéadú.

Oideachas trí Ghaeilge

229. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den an Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cén to-radh a bhí ar an scéim phiólótach páirt-tumoideachais a luaitear i dtuarascáil bhliantúil de chuid a roinne a foilsíodh sa bhliain 2015; an bhfuil sé ar intinn ag an roinn an scéim sin a leathnú; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [39249/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Cuireann an Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge béim ar chur chun feidhme páirt-tumadh i ngach bunscoil. Iarradh ar an gComhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta comhairle a thabhairt ar pháirt-tumadh nó ar Fhoghlaim Chomhtháite Ábhar agus Teangacha (FCÁT) mar chuid dá cuid oibre ar fhorbairt curaclaim teanga ag an mbunleibhéal.

Ó Mheán Fómhair 2016 tugadh isteach Curaclam nua comhtháite Teanga Bunscoile do naíonáin bheaga go dtí rang a dó, a chuimsíonn an Ghaeilge agus an Béarla araon. Sa churaclam seo tacaítear le foghlaim teanga na bpáistí sa dá theanga, i nGaeilge agus i mBéarla, trí mheán eispéireas d'ardchaighdeán. Tá sé d'aidhm a chinntiú sa churaclam go sealbhaíonn páistí scileanna inaistrithe teanga a chabhróidh leo i bhfoghlaim na Gaeilge agus an Bhéarla le linn a mbunoideachais agus i dteangacha breise nuair a roghnaíonn siad iad ag an dara leibhéal. Tá obair faoi lán seoil anois i bhforbairt an Churaclaim Bunscolaíochta don tríú go dtí an séú rang agus beidh sé seo ar fáil do scoileanna i bhfómhar na bliana 2018.

Sa Churaclam Teanga Bunscoile, neamhchosúil le curaclam 1999 a bhfuil struchtúr éagsúil air, e.g., snáitheanna éagsúla agus aonaid snáitheanna don dá theanga, don Bhéarla agus don Ghaeilge, tá an t-imeascadh seo idir teangacha tábhachtach do mhúinteoirí bunscoileanna le go ndéanann siad pleanáil ar son agus tacú le dul chun cinn páistí sa chéad teanga atá acu (T1) agus sa dara teanga (T2), bíodh sé i nGaeilge nó i mBéarla. Aistríonn páistí scileanna agus coincheapa áirithe ón gcéad go dtí an dara teanga agus ansin ar aghaidh chuig an tríú teanga.

Nuair a bhaintear úsáid as an struchtúr céanna curaclaim don dá theanga tacaítear le múinteoirí chun pleanáil a dhéanamh ar son foghlaim teanga páistí a phleanáil agus a imeascadh sa Bhéarla agus sa Ghaeilge. Tógann sé seo ar dhá chineál comhtháthaithe mar a dhéantar cur síos orthu i gcuraclam 1999, .i. Béarla agus Gaeilge. Aithnítear ann an tríú cineál de chomhthathú a bhaineann le foghlaim teangacha ar fud trí shnáithe de theanga ó bhéal, léamh agus scríobh.

Déanann an Curaclam nua Teanga Bunscoile cur chun cinn ar *Fhoghlaim Chomhtháite Ábhar agus Teangacha* (FCÁT) mar bhealach éifeachtach chun cur le nochtadh páistí go Gaeilge

trí chomhthéacsanna firéanta a chruthú do pháistí chun an teanga a úsáid. Mar shampla, seans go mbeadh teagasc ábhair eile ar an gcuraclam i gceist, nó gnéithe a bhaineann le hábhar eile á dteagasc trí Ghaeilge. Tá an Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta (CNCM) tar éis Ábhar Tacaíochta a fhorbairt maidir le cén chaoi chun úsáid a bhaint as FCÁT. Tá an t-ábhar seo ina chuid de Shraith Straitéisí ar líne chun tacú le cur chun feidhme na scoileanna maidir le Curaclam nua Teanga Bunscoile do naíonaín suas go dtí rang a dó.

Tá clár cuimsitheach um fhorbairt ghairmiúil leanúnach in áit chun tacú le cur chun feidhme an Churaclaim nua Teanga Bunscoile. Tagann múinteoirí, mar chuid den fhorbairt ghairmiúil seo, ar chomhairle maidir leis an gcaoi chun úsáid a bhaint as cuir chuige éagsúla leis an nGaeilge a mhúineadh agus leis an nGaeilge a úsáid mar mheán teagaisc thar na gnéithe eile den churaclam. Seo é cur chuige FCÁT.

Student Universal Support Ireland Administration

230. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of students who have been below the threshold for the special rate of maintenance grant in each of the years 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017 but have not been awarded the special rate of grant due to not holding a qualifying social welfare payment or not being on said payment for the required timeframe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39253/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The following table provides a breakdown for each of the academic years 2012/13 to 2017/18 (to date) in the category requested by the Deputy. The data provided in the following table is in respect of students who applied to SUSI.

The 2017/18 Student Grant Scheme was published on the 31st of March 2017. The qualifying criteria for the special rate of maintenance grant is as follows: 1. The student must qualify for the standard rate of grant; 2. Total reckonable income, after income disregards and Child Dependant increase(s) are excluded, must not exceed €23,000; and 3. As at 31 December 2016, the reckonable income must include one of the eligible long-term social welfare payments prescribed in the Student Grant Scheme.

The eligibility of a person to whom this Scheme applies for the award of a grant, or the level of the grant awarded, may be assessed or re-assessed by the awarding authority in the event of changes of circumstances between 1 January following the reference period and the end of the academic year, including certain eligible payments for the special rate of maintenance grant.

Under Threshold - Not in receipt of Special Rate

Scheme Year	Total	No DSP payment	DSP payment (no eligible payment)	DSP payment (Eligible payment - other criteria not met)
2017/18*	5,485	2,783	619	2,083
2016/17	7,559	3,925	780	2,854
2015/16	7,624	4,020	797	2,807
2014/15	7,177	3,787	670	2,720
2013/14	6,466	3,524	524	2,418
2012/13	4,785	2,367	346	2,072

* 2017/18 figures are to date. Also important to note the threshold changed from 22,703 to 23,000 this year.

Fire Safety

231. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary schools that have requested funding from his Department to carry out fire safety works in the past three years by county, in tabular form; the number of requests approved and rejected by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39285/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information sought by the Deputy is attached in the format requested.

I wish to assure the Deputy that my Department takes the safety of children, teachers and all those who work in schools extremely seriously. My Department has recently announced a range of extra measures to address fire safety concerns in schools which include:

- fire safety audit of a representative sample of 25 to 30 schools constructed over the last 20 years to confirm compliance with Fire Safety Certificates

- review of all major building projects currently in process to ensure compliance with BCAR

Where a school authority has a significant concern in relation to fire safety they should employ a Fire Safety Consultant to carry out an audit of their school building and if works are required to address these concerns the school should immediately submit an Emergency Works Application for funding to my Department.

Also it is open to primary schools to utilise their Minor Works Grant, to address such works as appropriate.

The applications highlighted overleaf may have been refused for a number of reasons, including that the application had already been submitted, or that the issue was not primarily a fire safety issue.

I can assure the Deputy that where fire safety works are requested my officials ensure to carry them out where warranted as a matter of priority.

Fire Safety Works by County & Year	Applications received by year			
Application Received	2015	2016	2017	Total number of schools involved
Cork	5	1		6
Approved	3			
Refused	2	1		
Donegal	2	3	2	7
Approved		2		
Refused	2	1	2	
Dublin	6	4	6	13
Approved	5	3	2	
Refused	1	1	4	
Galway	4	2	1	6
Approved	3	1		
Refused	1	1	1	
Kildare	1	2	1	3

Fire Safety Works by County & Year			Applications received by year	
Approved		1		
Decision pending			1	
Refused	1	1		
Kerry	1			1
Approved	1			
Kilkenny	3			3
Approved	1			
Refused	2			
Leitrim	1			1
Refused	1			
Limerick	2			2
Approved	1			
Refused	1			
Louth	1			1
Refused	1			
Mayo	1			1
Approved	1			
Meath		1	1	2
Refused		1	1	
Monaghan		1		1
Refused		1		
Offaly	2		1	3
Approved	1			
Refused	1		1	
Tipperary	1		1	2
Refused	1		1	
Waterford	3			3
Approved	1			
Refused	2			
Westmeath			1	1
Refused			1	
Wexford	2	2		4
Approved	2	1		
Refused		1		
Wicklow	2	2	1	5
Approved	2	1		
Refused		1	1	

Fire Safety Regulations

232. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when fire safety concerns were identified at a school (details supplied); the actions taken; when they were taken to

deal with these concerns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39286/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): On 1 September my Department published fire safety reports for five school buildings constructed in 2008, including the school in question, where issues had been identified in respect of the compliance with their fire safety certificates.

These Fire safety reports were completed in July 2016. The findings of the 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 that 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.

It is also important to note that in the case of each of the schools, the Department has engaged extensively with the Fire Officers of the relevant Local Authorities. The Fire Officers have broadly welcomed the Department's proactive approach to dealing with the issues highlighted and have indicated their acceptance of the course of action being followed by the Department, including the identified remediation works and the fact that the schools continue to be occupied on a day-to-day basis.

The background to the Fire Safety Reports has been outlined in the Press Statement on 1 September with the publication of the report. In October 2015, following the issues that arose in respect of Rush/Lusk ETNS, the Department made arrangements for the procurement of fire safety inspections of the five schools constructed in 2008.

A Consultant was appointed to carry out the fire inspection audits of the schools. The initial fire safety investigations were carried out in January 2016. Draft Fire Reports were prepared in March 2016. In order to complete the reports it was necessary for the Fire Consultant to gather further information on the buildings including compliance reports, drawings etc. and to conduct further investigations and site visits. The Final Reports were received in July 2016.

The Department met with WBS and their Architectural Consultant in June 2016. It was agreed at the meeting that WBS would liaise with the Department's Consultant's and would carry out the required works in the relevant schools.

In August 2016 WBS advised that the priority works (i.e. immediate essential improvement works) had been carried out at the schools. Despite a number of requests by the Department, photographic reports and commentary on the works were sought following the works in August but information was not received until late September and early October 2016. The Department's Consultant issued a commentary on the information to WBS on 25th November 2016 expressing concerns.

In January 2017 the Department's Project Managers advised WBS that following their reports in relation to the remedial works at the schools, commentary received from the Fire Consultant had suggested that the reports provided did not address the original Fire Consultant reports in their entirety. They were requested to provide reference photographs for each item deemed to be attended to and for any items not yet completed to include a reason for not addressing and a proposed date for attending to same.

Further site visits to the schools were carried out by the Fire Consultant in March/April 2017. This was a visual inspection of the previously advised completed items by the Fire Con-

sultant. The Draft Report which was received from the Fire Consultant in May 2017 following this visit concluded that very little upgrade works which were previously advised had actually been carried out. Where works were carried out they were not to a satisfactory standard and there were issues identified within the Fire Consultant's report of July 2016 which had not been addressed.

While it had been the Department's understanding that WBS had carried out the works in summer 2016 which had been highlighted in the Fire Consultant reports as being most urgent and important, it became apparent following review by the Fire Consultant that this was not in fact the case.

On 5 May 2017 the Department met with WBS to discuss the findings of the reports of May 2017. WBS committed to visiting the schools in week commencing 8th May to review. Since that date the progress in respect of the school in question is as follows.

A meeting was also held with the Fire Officer on 23rd June 2017 to discuss this school. A further meeting was held with the Fire Officer for Monday 4th September to provide an update on the programme of works proposed. The works to be carried out include fire-stopping upgrades, intumescent paint/steel protection, and plasterboard partitions, emergency lighting, fire door upgrades and renewing cavity barriers.

The Fire Consultant has agreed the final scope of works with the Contractor. The Department intends to commence each element of work as soon as possible. It is anticipated that all works should be completed by the end of October.

On completion of the works these will be inspected by the Department and a full report will be submitted to the Fire Officer.

My Department has also been in communication with the Patron Body and the school authority and has updated them on progress. In addition a further meeting has been sought with the Fire Officer which will be attended by representatives of the School Authority and my Department.

Student Assistance Fund

233. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the tax relief or financial support available to a person (details supplied) going back to college for a four-year course. [39328/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): The principal support provided by my Department, is the student grant scheme. The scheme makes available means-tested financial assistance to qualifying full-time students in further and higher education.

My Department also provides funding for the Student Assistance Fund (SAF). The fund is available in various publicly funded higher education institutions. The SAF provides financial assistance to students experiencing financial difficulties while attending third level. Students can be assisted towards their rent, childcare costs, transport costs and books/class materials. The SAF is open to full-time registered students on courses of not less than one year's duration leading to an undergraduate or postgraduate qualification.

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

DEIS Data

234. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new schools that have been included in the DEIS scheme; and the number of schools that no longer qualify which have been excluded. [39338/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that 79 new schools have been selected for inclusion in DEIS with effect from September 2017. The list of these schools 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-Plan-2017-New-DEIS-Schools-List.pdf>

The Deputy may be aware that following the launch of the DEIS Plan 2017, I made it clear at that time, that schools currently participating in the DEIS programme would continue to receive the same level of supports under the School Support Programme for the 2017/18 school year.

Schools Building Projects Status

235. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the timeframe for the delivery of the planned education campus at Ballinrea, Carrigaline, County Cork; when he expects the project to go to tender; the expected date of commencement of construction and the occupancy of the three new school buildings; if the capital funding is in place for the delivery of this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39341/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project to which the Deputy refers has been devolved for delivery to Cork Education & Training Board.

Contractors for enabling works have been invited to tender. The tenders received are currently being evaluated by the Design Team and it is expected that a Tender Report will be submitted to my Department later this month. It is intended that the enabling works will be carried out in October/November.

The pre-qualification process for the main contractors has also been run and the submissions received on foot of that process are also currently being evaluated by the Design Team. It is expected that a preliminary Report in this matter will be submitted to my Department in October.

As soon as contractors are pre-qualified and tender documents are completed, the project will then be considered for progression to tender and construction stage.

Schools Building Projects Status

236. **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 in view of the delays that have occurred and the need to provide additional and upgraded permanent school accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39346/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Stage 2b process for the major building project at the school to which the Deputy refers has recently been completed and the project will now proceed to Stage 3 (Tender Stage). The Department will be in contact with the Board of Management shortly with regard to progressing the building project through Tender and Construction stages.

In parallel, the Board of Management and its Design Team are currently completing the pre-qualification process. The Invitation to tender will issue to the short-list of contractors when the pre-qualification process is complete.

Schools Building Projects Status

237. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 108 and 421, of 5 May and 20 June 2017 respectively, when funding will be approved for the new purpose school at a school (details supplied); when the project will move to the next stage of the process; and when the new school will be complete. [39375/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, a building project for the school in question was included in the Department's 6 Year Capital Programme.

In that regard, I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has been in recent contact with the school in respect of information that is required to progress the proposed project. I understand that the school has undertaken to provide this information to my Department.

When this information is received and considered, my Department will be in further contact with the school authority regard the building project.

School Transport Availability

238. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of concessionary places available with existing transport providers under the school transport scheme for children in County Louth for the 2017-2018 school year; and if he has satisfied himself that the places available are sufficient to met demand. [39381/17]

240. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of applications for the school transport scheme which were received in County Louth for the 2017-2018 school year; the number of applications deemed successful in meeting the criteria for a place in the scheme; the number awarded concessionary places; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39385/17]

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 my Department's mainstream School Transport Schemes children are generally eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their

nearest school. All eligible children are being accommodated with school transport provision.

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

The terms of the School Transport Schemes are applied equitably on a national basis.

Bus Éireann are compiling the figures requested and they will forward them directly to the Deputy when they are finalised.

School Transport Data

239. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of children with special educational needs that applied to the school transport scheme in County Louth for the 2017-2018 school year primary; the number deemed successful in meeting the criteria for a place; the number awarded concessionary places; and if his attention has been drawn to cases in which children are without a place on existing school transport. [39384/17]

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.

In general, children with special educational needs are eligible for school transport if they are attending the nearest school that is resourced to meet their special educational needs.

Bus Éireann has confirmed that, to date, 544 applications for children with special educational needs were received for schools in County Louth for the 2017/18 school year. A total of 433 tickets have been issued to children who are eligible for school transport and 2 tickets to children who applied for transport on a concessionary basis.

There are a further 109 applications which were submitted in recent weeks and these are being processed and some new services are currently out to tender. Bus Éireann hope to accommodate these children as soon as possible and in the meantime will keep the families informed of progress.

The terms of the school transport schemes are applied equitably on a national basis.

Question No. 240 answered with Question No. 238.

State Examinations Appeals

241. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the time-frame for the leaving certificate appeals process does not take cognisance of the CAO timeline (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39391/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations. In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

State Examinations Appeals

242. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason the examiner for the leaving certificate appeals cannot make a determination on the results of the appeal; the reason the papers must go through a formal process (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39392/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations. In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

Schools Building Projects Status

243. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the current and future plans concerning a school (details supplied) with regard to an extension, replacement and relocation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39432/17]

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.

Residential Institutions Redress Scheme

244. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 204 of 27 June 2017, when the review of Caranua will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39471/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As I explained in my reply to the Deputy's question of 27 June, it was envisaged that the initial phase of the Caranua eligibility review would be conducted by an economist on secondment to my Department from the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service. That initial phase, which involves a review of Caranua's expenditure to date and an estimation of the projected expenditure taking into account applications on hands and anticipated further applications together with an estimation of any possible underspend of the available funding, is nearing completion.

In accordance with the Terms of Reference of the review, if an underspend is indicated a consultation process will be initiated with stakeholders about an expansion of the eligibility criteria, including identification of the groups that could be considered for inclusion in any expansion, and will identify possible arrangements for verifying eligibility, resource implications and related issues.

In the event that the findings of the initial phase of the review indicate that there is unlikely to be an underspend of the €110 million in funding available to Caranua, the review will conclude at that point.

School Costs

245. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the practice of secondary schools contracting out the setting of mock junior certificate and leaving certificate papers in addition to the marking of these papers; his further views on whether the school teachers should do this themselves; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that this imposes extra costs on parents of children attending secondary schools; the measures which can be taken in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39490/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): At the outset I wish to state that, neither my Department nor the State Examinations Commission has any role in relation to the setting or marking of mock examinations. Mock examinations can either be set by teachers themselves or are sourced from commercial providers. Similarly, they are either marked by the class teacher or many mock providers offer a marking service. This is a decision for the school.

The updated Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) published by my Department in July 2015 provided for the introduction of a modernised Junior Cycle curriculum across all subjects. The Framework provided for final Junior Cycle Examinations marked by the State Examinations Commission and new classroom-based assessments conducted by classroom teachers. This dual approach will help to ensure a learner experience appropriate to the needs of the 21st century. It is recognised that embedding classroom-based assessment and formative assessment for learning represents a major culture change for teachers and schools – and students and parents. The Junior Cycle Framework is moving away from reliance on a single external examination and promoting a wider range of learning opportunities for all.

Education Costs

246. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on extra costs being imposed on parents of children attending post-primary schools such as charges for transition year activities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39491/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My ambition is to make the Irish education and training service the best in Europe within a decade.

To deliver on my ambition to be the best we have to improve information and complaint procedures for parents and students, particularly in relation to costs.

I want to give parents a strong voice in ensuring costs are always kept to a minimum.

I announced in April of this year measures to be adopted by schools to reduce school costs. The circular can be accessed on my Department's website at https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0032_2017.pdf. The circular advises that schools should consult with parents on their views and suggestions on cost reduction initiatives and that a questionnaire which would address the principles of cost-effective practice should be sent to parents once every 3 years.

Extra-curricular activities and education trips abroad form a part of the school programme, including the programme offered by some schools to students in transition year. In planning

such activities schools are requested to be sensitive to the financial pressures on parents.

In accordance with my Department's circulars, the objective of an educational tour should be to provide a significant benefit in the educational, intellectual, cultural and social development of pupils taking part. It is a matter for each individual school to decide on the suitability of any proposed school tour having regard to these requirements. Likewise it is a matter for each school to determine the extra-curricular activities that it undertakes. In making decisions about extra-curricular activities of school or school tours, all schools should take into account the costs for parents so as to ensure that these are not prohibitive or serve to exclude any pupils.

Voluntary contributions by parents are permissible provided it is made absolutely clear to parents that there is no question of compulsion to pay and that, in making a contribution, they are doing so of their own volition.

The manner in which voluntary contributions are sought and collected is a matter for school management, however their collection should be such as not to create a situation where either parents or pupils could reasonably infer that the contributions take on a compulsory character.

If parents have a concern that there is some compulsion regarding contributions in a school, they can bring the matter to the attention of my Department who will follow up with the school in question.

School Enrolments

247. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the guidelines or legal requirements in place to prevent a child being unenrolled from one school to be enrolled in another school by a parent or guardian without the knowledge or consent of the child's other parent or guardian; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39496/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The selection and enrolment of pupils in schools is the responsibility of the authorities of the individual school. Under section 15 (2) (d) of the Education Act 1998, each school is legally obliged to disclose its enrolment policy and to ensure that as regards that policy that principles of equality and the right of parents to send their children to a school of the parents' choice are respected.

Article 42 of the Constitution provides for the right of parents to choose the form of education they provide or to have provided to their children. Primary legislation gives effect to this right and includes the Education Act 1998 and the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

None of the foregoing legislation specifically distinguishes between parents who act in concert and those who disagree and are separated, divorced or unmarried. However each provides that "parent" shall be interpreted to include: "a foster parent, a guardian appointed under the Guardianship of Children Acts, 1964 to 1997, or other person acting in loco parentis who has a child in his or her care subject to any statutory power or order of a court and, in the case of a child who has been adopted under the Adoption Acts, 1952 to 1998, or, where the child has been adopted outside the State, means the adopter or adopters or the surviving adopter".

In conducting the enrolment process a Board of Management must address the circumstances of each case while respecting any order made by the Court in relation to the custody and welfare of the child.

Special Educational Needs

248. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if accommodations can be made in order to arrange a donation to the Special Education Support Service (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39506/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): From 21st March, 2017 the Special Education Support Service (SESS), National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) and the Visiting Teacher Service for Children who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing and Children who are Blind/Visually Impaired (VTHVI) transferred from my Department to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and joined with the services already being provided by NCSE's SENOs and administrative staff to form a new NCSE Support Service. This new service aims to develop schools' capacity to include students with special educational needs and to promote a continuum of educational provision which is inclusive and responsive.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), which is an independent statutory agency, is responsible for organising and planning education provision for children with Special Educational Needs, including:

- providing Continual Professional Development (CPD) and support for teachers in the area of special educational needs (SEN) to enhance the quality of learning and teaching in relation to SEN provision (formerly provided through the SESS - see below)

- providing support and expertise to partner schools on issues related to behaviour (formerly provided through the NBSS)

- supporting the introduction of the new model of resource teaching allocation to schools and to develop capacity to meet the needs of students with SEN

As the matter referred to my the Deputy relates to the NCSE's Regional Support Service, the matter has been referred to the NCSE for direct reply.

School Admissions

249. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary school classes that have 30 or more students for the 2017-2018 academic year and the 2016-2017 academic year respectively, by county. [39599/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Statistics Section of my Department's website contains extensive data relating to class sizes at primary level. The most recent published information relates to the 2016/2017 school year.

Statistics in relation to the current school year will be published in 2018 when the data has been compiled.

The configuration of classes and the deployment of classroom teachers are done at local school level. My Department's guidance to schools is that the number of pupils in any class is kept as low as possible taking all relevant contextual factors into account (e.g. classroom accommodation, fluctuating enrolment etc.). School authorities are also requested, where possible, to use their autonomy under the staffing schedule to implement smaller class sizes for junior classes.

School Funding

250. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for further funding for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39637/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department approved a devolved grant for the provision of five additional classrooms to the school concerned earlier this year to meet their immediate accommodation needs.

The school authority has been in further contact with my Department in respect of their accommodation requirements. The matter is currently being considered and my Department expects to be in further contact with the school authority shortly.

Higher Education Courses Applications

251. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if accommodations can be made with the Central Applications Office in order to allow a person (details supplied) participate on their desired course; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39678/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Higher Education Institutions are autonomous and academically independent and set the entry criteria for admissions to their courses. While higher education institutions have delegated the task of processing applications to their courses to the Central Applications Office (CAO), they retain the function of making decisions on their entry requirements. Neither I nor my Department have a role in relation to the operation of the CAO or the admission of students to third level institutions.

Departmental Properties

252. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his Department's interests in its lease of a school (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39714/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The property referred to by the Deputy is not in my ownership. However, in common with other buildings of its kind, where significant grant aid is provided by my Department for the development of school premises, investment is secured by way of a long-term legal agreement known as a charging lease. There is a charging lease in place on the property referred to by the Deputy dated 2nd July, 1956 for 99 years, which means that I have a vested interest in the property.

In circumstances where a property has ceased to be used as a school, and a request is received to release the State's interest secured under a charging lease, such requests are considered in the context of the specific circumstances which pertain to the individual property. I can confirm that my Department received a request from the Property owner to release my interest in the property. My Department has been in contact with the property owner regarding its future use by Waterford Wexford ETB for educational purposes.

Residential Institutions

253. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for a memorial to remember residential institution abuse victims as recommended in the 2009

Ryan report, in view of the fact that €500,000 has been set aside for the project for the past eight years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39731/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, the proposed Memorial, which won an open competition, was called the Journey of Light and was designed by Studio Negri and Hennessy and Associates. The design concept was that the Memorial would be integrated with the Garden of Remembrance and would provide an enduring symbol of lost innocence to inspire future generations to ensure the protection of all children.

However, An Bord Pleanála refused planning permission for the Memorial in November 2013 on the grounds that it would have an adverse impact on the setting, character and function of the Garden of Remembrance.

It was suggested that a central Dublin location could be identified on a cost neutral basis with appropriate zoning which could be used as a site for the Memorial. The difficulty was that the winning design uses the physical features of the Garden of Remembrance site and the design cannot be created on a different site.

The Journey of Light was the only design selected after holding an international competition. No other design was even shortlisted.

My Department's officials have recently written to the original Memorial committee to get their views on whether there are alternatives to commissioning a sculpture piece but which would act as a permanent reminder of Ireland's grim history of children's lives in State run institutions.

Schools Site Acquisitions

254. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of a new site for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39736/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department issued comments on the stage 2b submission to the Board of Management on 7th February and requested confirmation from the Board that the new school site has been finalised between the Patron body and the land owner. My Department has recently been in contact with the BOM who has advised that the site agreement is nearing completion.

Upon completion of the site acquisition by the Patron, my Department will then revert to the Board of Management with regard to further progression of the project.

Schools Building Projects

255. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding progress on a new school building project for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39737/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that a building project for the school to which he refers was included in my Department's 6 Year Capital Programme.

The delivery of the building project necessitates the acquisition of a suitable site and my Department is in ongoing liaison with the Patron of the school in the matter.

Schools Building Projects

256. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the next phase of a school building for a school (details supplied) will commence; the status of this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39738/17]

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 the tender process. The Letter of Intent has issued to the preferred bidder and, subject to no issues, arising it is anticipated that construction will commence early in the 4th quarter of 2017.

Schools Site Acquisitions

257. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of a new site for a school (details supplied) as announced in November 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39739/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, a project to provide permanent accommodation for the school in question is included on my Department's Capital Programme.

Officials in my Department are liaising with officials in the relevant local authority in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the identification and acquisition of a suitable site for this school and all parties are working to advance this process as expeditiously as possible.

While I am not in a position to provide further information at this time, I can assure the Deputy that the school patron will be informed of the proposed location as soon as it is possible to do so.

Schools Building Projects

258. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of a new secondary school for the Malahide and Portmarnock areas of County Dublin as announced in November 2015; if he has identified locations for these proposed schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39740/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, a project to provide permanent accommodation for the new post primary school to serve Malahide/Portmarnock is included on my Department's Capital Programme.

Officials in my Department have been liaising with officials in Fingal County Council in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the identification and acquisition of a suitable site for this school. As with other site acquisitions in the area, due to the scarcity of suitable sites this process has proven to be quite challenging and in that context has taken some time to date. However, I would like to assure the Deputy that all parties are working to progress matters as expeditiously as possible.

Questions - Written Answers
Schools Building Projects

259. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of a new secondary school for the Swords area of County Dublin as announced in November 2015; if he has identified locations for the proposed school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39741/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Officials from my Department have been working closely with Fingal County Council under the Memorandum of Understanding for the acquisition of school sites in order to identify and procure a suitable site for Swords Community College, a new post primary school to open in September 2018.

My Department is currently working to complete the acquisition of a site at Moorestown, Swords to accommodate this school and this process is at an advanced stage. The school's patron, Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board, has been informed of the proposed location. The Design Team has been appointed and is currently progressing the design proposals in advance of pre-planning discussions with the planning authority.

Schools Site Acquisitions

260. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of a permanent site for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39742/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, a project to provide permanent accommodation for the school in question is included on my Department's Capital Programme.

Officials in my Department are liaising with officials in the relevant local authority in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the identification and acquisition of a suitable site for this school. This process has proven to be quite challenging given the scarcity of suitable sites and in that context has taken some time to date. However, I would like to assure the Deputy that all parties are working to progress matters as expeditiously as possible.

School Transport Provision

261. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding transport to a school (details supplied) in County Cork for children with special needs; the steps he will take to resolve same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39744/17]

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 service in question operates as part of the Special Education Needs element of the school transport scheme and I understand that the contractor operating this service resigned his

contract at short notice.

Bus Éireann is currently in the process of re-tendering this service and they hope to have it operational as soon as possible. I will ask Bus Éireann to keep the families informed on the progress with this re-tendering. A Special Transport Grant towards the cost of private transport arrangements may be claimed by the families until a new service is established.

Schools Site Acquisitions

262. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the purchase of a site and the delivery of a new school building for a school (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39750/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Officials from my Department have worked closely with officials from Cork County Council under the Memorandum of Understanding for the acquisition of school sites towards procuring a suitable site for the building project to which the Deputy refers.

A suitable permanent site for the school has been identified and agreement in principle with the landowners has been reached. The acquisition process is currently at the conveyancing stage and we are working to complete it as soon as possible.

The school patron has been informed of the position in relation to the acquisition.

Once the acquisition process is completed, the project for the school will advance into architectural planning.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

263. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has given consideration to include a third level education college (details supplied) to qualify for SUSI education grants; and if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the many students who do not reach a minimum number of points in their leaving certificate examination must then source third level education through private colleges in which their families find it very difficult to meet the costs involved. [39751/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under my Department’s student grant scheme, eligible candidates may receive funding provided they are attending an approved course at an approved institution, as defined in the scheme. The definition of an approved institution is set out in Section 7 of the Student Support Act 2011 and Regulation 3 of the Student Support Regulations 2017.

The college to which the Deputy refers, is not an approved institution, for student grant purposes. However, it is open to higher education institutions that operate on a ‘for profit’ basis, to use their own resources to provide financial supports to any of their students that they consider to be in particular need.

Decisions in relation to the future funding of student supports will be informed by the consideration of the options contained in the Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education. As committed to in the Programme for Government, the report has been referred to the Education Committee as part of the process for building political consensus on the most sustainable approach for funding the higher education sector in the future.

Third Level Fees

264. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost in 2018 for abolishing all third level fees, both capitation and tuition, for under graduate and post graduate. [39791/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Based on the number of students that qualified for free fees funding in the academic year 2015/16 (and were therefore liable to pay the Student Contribution), and taking into account overall expected increases in student numbers, it is estimated that the net cost to my Department of abolishing the Student Contribution for undergraduate students for the 2018/19 academic year would be approximately €220 m. This figure takes into account the resulting reduction to my Department's Student Grant Scheme budget.

With regard to funding towards tuition fees at undergraduate level, my Department provided funding of €282m in the academic year 2015/16 under the free fees schemes.

The cost to the State associated with the abolition of postgraduate fees is dependent on varying factors associated with the type of study i.e. full-time or part-time, varying fees associated with different course types and higher fees for international students.

However, based on the number of EU students registered on postgraduate courses in the academic year 2016/17, and using the average cost of an EU postgraduate course, the estimated cost to the State of abolishing fees for EU postgraduate students for the 2018/19 academic year would be €80 m. It should also be noted that under my Department's Student Grant Scheme, funding of €8m was provided for postgraduate tuition fees in 2016/17. Taking this into account, the net additional cost to my Department would therefore be in the region of €72m.

It should be noted that the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education found that abolishing student registration fees for undergraduate students while delivering the level of investment that the higher education system needs would cost the State €1.3 billion extra per annum.

The Government is committed to providing a more sustainable funding model for higher education, as evidenced by the fact that Budget 2017 provided the first increase in investment in higher education since 2009, involving €36.5 million extra funding in 2017 and €160 million extra over 3 years. In addition the Government is exploring the possibility of an employer-exchequer funding mechanism which could realise up to €200 million in additional annual funding by 2020.

Schools Designation

265. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position in relation to a national school (details supplied) not being listed as a designated feeder school by his Department for a new secondary school in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39800/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): For school planning purposes, my Department divides the country into 314 geographic areas known as school planning areas which facilitates the orderly planning of school provision and accommodation needs. In identifying the requirement for additional school places, my Department uses a Geographical Information System to identify the areas under increased demographic pressure nationwide.

When it is decided that a new school is required to meet demographic needs in a school planning area, a patronage process is conducted to decide who will operate the school. Parental preferences for each patron from parents of children who reside in the school planning area are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process.

All new schools established since 2011 to meet demographic demand are required to prioritise pupil applications from within the designated school planning area(s) which the school was established to serve. This does not preclude schools from enrolling pupils from outside of the designated school planning area, rather it reflects the need to accommodate in the first instance the demographic for which the school was established.

It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998. In schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection process may be necessary. In this regard a Board of Management may find it necessary to prioritise enrolment of children from particular areas or particular age groups or on the basis of some other criterion. For example, some schools give priority to applicants who have attended a particular primary school (known as a feeder school). The criteria to be applied by schools in such circumstances are a matter for the schools themselves. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, it may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in their school of first choice.

My Department's priority is ensuring all pupils have access to a school place which unfortunately may not always result in a school place that is their first choice. A range of other factors including parental choice, school location and ease of access and commuting patterns can contribute to oversubscription of certain schools within an area.

School Transport

266. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a request to provide school transport for a number of children from Mullinavat to New Ross; and if the applications for a place on the existing bus will be re-examined in view of the fact some qualify under the scheme. [39803/17]

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 my Department's Post Primary School Transport Scheme children are generally eligible for transport where they reside not less than 4.8 kilometres from and are attending their nearest school.

Where families are not eligible for school transport they may apply on a concessionary basis only. Concessionary transport 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.

For the 2017/18 school year the number of applications for transport on a concessionary basis exceeded the number of spare seats available on existing services in the Mullinavat area.

A number of families were not allocated seats during the subsequent selection process and they have been refunded their payment. However, these families should continue to liaise with their local Bus Éireann office as additional spare seats may become available during the school year.

The terms of the School Transport Schemes are applied equitably on a national basis.

School Enrolments

267. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the current and or expected position in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Kildare, with particular reference to recent low enrolment numbers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39820/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is in ongoing contact with the Patron of the school referred to and is aware of the school's enrolment position. The Patron's office has advised my Department that there are no plans to close the school and that a Single Manager has been appointed. My Department will continue to liaise with the Patron in relation to the matter.

Schools Building Projects Applications

268. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress made to date in the consideration of a project to approve funding for a replacement school (details supplied); when the next step of the process will be approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39842/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that building projects for the two schools referred to by the Deputy in the details supplied are included in the Department's 6 Year Capital Programme.

Discussions are ongoing in respect of site related issues and the school will be notified of the outcome when finalised.

Institutes of Technology Funding

269. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when funding will be approved for a new science and engineering building in Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39844/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As part of the ongoing review of capital funding requirements in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Galway Mayo Institute of Technology has submitted a proposal outlining a number of projects that could be prioritised for capital funding should it become available.

One of these projects is among a number from across the sector that are being considered for inclusion in the Higher Education PPP programme announced as part of the Capital Plan

2016-2021.

Cóiríocht Scoile

270. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cén uair a cheadófar maoiniú chun athchóiriú a dhéanamh ar scoile (sonraí tugtha) agus chun síneadh a chur léi, chomh maith le cóiríocht shealadach a chur ar fáil fad is a bheidh an obair ar bun; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [39846/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Cheadaigh mo Roinn deontas cineachta suntasach i Meán Fómhair 2014 don scoil i dtrácht le haghaidh leathnú buan agus oibreacha athchumraíochta trína ndéanfaí gach cóiríocht réamhdhéanta a bhaint de láithreán na scoile.

Fuair mo Roinn soiléiriú i dtaca le moladh le haghaidh réimse níos leithne d'oibreacha ina bhfuil impleachtaí costais suntasacha i gceist. Tá an t-ábhar á mheas faoi láthair agus beidh mo Roinn i dteagmháil leis an scoil arís maidir leis an ábhar chomh luath agus is féidir.

Schools Building Projects Status

271. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress on the extension planned for a secondary school (details supplied) in County Kildare which is included in his Department's building plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39861/17]

272. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress on the extension planned for a college (details supplied) in County Kildare which is included in his Department's building plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39862/17]

273. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress on the extension planned for a college (details supplied) in County Kildare which is included in his Department's building plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39863/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 271 to 273, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy is aware, building projects for the schools referred to are included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme.

My Department has undertaken site visits to the schools relating to the preparatory work required to advance the projects. My Department will continue to liaise with the schools in the context of progressing the projects through the architectural planning process.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

274. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the level of supports available through SUSI or other such sources for persons that were on jobseeker's payment but are commencing a level 9 masters conversion course which is a higher diploma in social policy and practice and is not a masters programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39876/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The principal support provided by my Department, is the student grant scheme. The scheme makes available means-tested financial assistance to qualifying full-time students in further and higher education.

Additional funding of €4 million was secured in Budget 2017 to facilitate the reinstatement of full maintenance grants, from September 2017, for the most disadvantaged postgraduate students.

Postgraduate students who meet the qualifying conditions for the special rate of grant under the Student Grant Scheme are eligible for a maintenance grant of up to €5,915; the income threshold for this grant is €23,000. Qualifying postgraduate students may also be eligible to have their tuition fees paid up to a 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.

My Department also provides funding for the Student Assistance Fund (SAF). The fund is available in various publicly funded higher education institutions. The SAF provides financial assistance to students experiencing financial difficulties while attending third level. Students can be assisted towards their rent, childcare costs, transport costs and books/class materials. The SAF is open to full-time registered students on courses of not less than one year's duration leading to an undergraduate or postgraduate qualification.

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.

Schools Building Projects Status

275. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a proposed building project at a school (details supplied); when this project will proceed to construction stage in view of the need to provide upgraded facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39897/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that a building project for the school to which he refers in the details supplied was included in my Department's 6 Year Capital Programme.

I wish to advise the Deputy that legal matters associated with the site transfer are currently being progressed. When finalised, my Department will liaise directly with the school authority regarding the building project.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

276. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a student is entitled to the maintenance component of the student grant in respect of a level 8 course on the national framework of qualifications while in receipt of the back to education allowance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39898/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Students in receipt of the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) are not eligible for maintenance support under the stu-

dent grant scheme, as this would result in a duplication of income support payments. However, students in receipt of BTEA, may be considered for SUSI fee supports up to a maximum of €6,270.

Brexit Issues

277. **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. [39077/17]

279. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has spoken to his EU counterparts regarding Brexit recently. [39096/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 277 and 279 together.

Since I took up office in June, engagement on Brexit with EU partners has been a central element of my work. This approach, building on the work done by my predecessor, 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. This was 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, not least on the issue of the financial settlement, and much work is still required ahead of any decision by the European Council on whether sufficient progress has been made.

We also discussed the Irish specific issues, which are one of the three priority issues for phase one of the negotiations. While some progress is being made on these issues, most notably with regard to the Common Travel Area, much work is still required on protecting the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts and the gains of the peace process, including sustaining North South cooperation and avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland. The Government supports the Task Force's Guiding Principles on Ireland and Northern Ireland which reflects our priorities and sets out important principles that should form the basis of future solutions on the Irish specific issues as part of the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement.

During my visit to Brussels earlier this month 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 later this week, as it 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. Earlier this month I had short meetings with my counterparts from Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Slovenia, as well as the Cypriot Minister for Defence, 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.

Good Friday Agreement

278. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he or his Department are making plans to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. [39094/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Planning is underway in my Department to mark the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, on 10th April next year. A number of events, at home and abroad, are being considered as part of a programme to highlight this important anniversary and to celebrate the achievement of the Agreement, which continues to be the cornerstone of our commitment to peace and reconciliation. These events will also be an opportunity to reflect on the peace process, past and present; to remember the loss of life during the years of conflict; and to look back at all that has happened on the journey of peace and reconciliation on the island of Ireland. This journey is of course an ongoing one, and the continued imperative to work to realise the full potential of the Good Friday Agreement will form part of the Government's approach to the 20th anniversary.

Question No. 279 answered with Question No. 277.

Brexit Issues

280. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the way in which his Department's officials are co-ordinating the latest round of Brexit meetings at EU level, particularly in relation to the preparation of a possible border after March 2019. [39102/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The European Commission Taskforce, led by Chief Negotiator, Michel Barnier, represents the EU27 in the Article 50 negotiations with the UK. The Taskforce is acting on the basis of the mandate approved by the EU27 Member States at the General Affairs Council (Art. 50) on 22 May and in accordance with the EU's overall approach to the negotiations as agreed in the European Council Guidelines of 29 April. The negotiations, which formally commenced on 19 June, are taking place on the basis of four-week negotiating cycles. Three rounds have taken place to date, with the fourth round set to commence on 25 September. In accordance with the European Council Guidelines and the Terms of Reference agreed between the EU and the UK, the negotiations are focusing on withdrawal issues during phase 1 (citizens' rights, financial settlement, Irish specific issues and "separation" issues which are of a more technical character) with the commencement of phase 2 (parallel discussions on future relationship issues) contingent on sufficient progress having been made on phase 1 issues.

Three Negotiating Groups have been established at technical level to advance negotiations on citizens' rights, the financial settlement and the other "separation" issues. In recognition of their complexity and sensitivity, it was agreed that resolving the Irish set of issues should be taken forward by the most senior officials within the negotiating teams by way of a High Level Dialogue.

The EU27 Member States are monitoring progress and giving guidance to the Taskforce through a dedicated Article 50 Working Party, which in turn reports to Coreper (Art. 50), on which Ireland's Permanent Representative to the European Union sits. This is ensuring that the negotiations are carried out under the overall strategic and political guidance of the EU27 Member States through the European Council (Art. 50) and the General Affairs Council (Art. 50), supported by a very high level of scrutiny at senior official and Ambassadorial levels.

My Department has the lead responsibility for coordinating a whole-of-Government approach to the negotiations and we are working actively with all Government Departments to this end, in particular in relation to the Irish-specific issues in the current phase of negotiations that require a cross-departmental approach such as the Common Travel Area and protecting the Good Friday Agreement and the gains of the peace process, including the avoidance of a hard border.

Both I and my officials are also working very closely with Mr Barnier and his team to ensure that Ireland's positions are understood and reflected in the Taskforce's approach to each round of the negotiations and of course the Permanent Representation in Brussels is also central to this work. Our intensive engagement with our counterparts from other Member States is also continuing at both political and official level.

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 was welcome, the UK's aspirations and statements of principle need to be backed by substantive commitments and clear links to workable solutions.

The Government welcomes and supports the Taskforce's paper on the "Guiding Principles for the dialogue on Ireland/Northern Ireland" of 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.

Passport Services

281. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views

on including the names of parents on a child's passport on the observations page or elsewhere (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39208/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): A passport is an internationally recognised travel document which attests to the identity and nationality of the bearer. The Passport Service does not have any plans to expand the purpose of a passport to indicate a parental relationship between a child and his/her parent(s). Parents are encouraged to complete the emergency contact details page at the back of their child's passport which may assist in this matter.

Passport Services

282. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if it is possible for an Irish passport holder to have their gender changed on the foreign births register once they have a gender recognition certificate; if this then entitles them to get a passport in their correct gender; if Irish embassies and consulates abroad have processes in place to help passport holders do this if necessary; and if his attention has been drawn to the fact that some passport holders are having difficulty getting their foreign births registration entry updated in this regard. [39232/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the issues currently facing passport holders seeking to have their gender changed on their Foreign Birth Registration Certificate. The Gender Recognition Act 2015 amended section 27 of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 to permit the setting up of a register for the purpose of the registration of gender recognition of foreign births.

The establishment of this register is awaiting finalisation of a Statutory Instrument. Consequently, it is not yet possible for a person with an existing Foreign Birth Registration Certificate to obtain a new Foreign Birth Registration Certificate in their new gender. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is making preparations for the register to go live once the Statutory Instrument is in place, which we expect in the coming months. A gender recognition certificate will be required in order to obtain a new Foreign Birth Registration Certificate reflecting a change in gender. However, this does not prevent a person from obtaining a passport in their new gender subject to the requirements of the Passports Act 2008 as amended (the Act). The Act makes provision for the policies and procedures which the Passport Service adopts in relation to the issuance of a passport. Section 11 of the Act provides for the issuing of a passport in a new gender and, if applicable, new name to applicants producing a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) issued by the Minister for Social Protection. With regard to current passport holders, the Passport Service may issue a passport in the new gender and new name on receipt of a completed passport application, current passport and GRC. In such circumstances, a new Foreign Birth Registration Certificate is not required.

My Department will have sole responsibility for the management of the new register for the gender recognition of foreign births. Training for staff, both at home and abroad, on LGBTQI issues is on-going. In June 2016, Consular Division hosted a training session on the language and sensitivities which staff may need to be mindful of when dealing with LGBTQI citizens in the course of their work. Additional training needs on the register will be incorporated into our future training programme for staff in Headquarters and in Missions moving forward.

Any member of the public seeking further information on the register should contact the Deputy Director of Consular Services at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, via the Department's central switchboard.

Departmental Expenditure

283. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the cost of a report by consultants (details supplied) on barriers to returning Irish emigrants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39252/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Indecon was appointed to this project following a competitive tendering process undertaken by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The report will focus on identifying solutions to disproportionate or unnecessary administrative burdens that negatively affect people wishing to return to Ireland to live.

This economic report will complement the work that the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Irish Abroad has already done in this area, and in particular, the report will review and propose measures to address difficulties in areas that are not immediately within the remit of Departments to alleviate. The report will inform Government policy and actions in relation to difficulties it finds.

Indecon (Ireland) will be paid €73,627.8 for the report and this will be financed from the Department's budget for diaspora affairs.

Anyone who wishing to highlight an example of a specific administrative difficulty they may have experienced in moving home to Ireland to live that could be of relevance in the context of this report is invited to write to the Irish Abroad Unit at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade or email globalirishhub@dfa.ie.

Northern Ireland

284. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on progress in the talks with the British Government and with the political parties in Stormont in relation to the re-establishment of the Northern Ireland Executive and Northern Ireland Assembly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39355/17]

292. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the negotiations to allow the Northern Ireland Assembly to be reconvened; and the timeframe for when the negotiations will be concluded. [39658/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 284 and 292 together.

The Government is determined, as co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, to do everything in our power to ensure all of its institutions are operating effectively, including the devolved Assembly and power-sharing Executive in Northern Ireland.

I remain in regular contact with Secretary of State Brokenshire on how both Governments can best continue to support and encourage the parties in achieving that essential objective.

In the first instance, the two largest parties whose mandates entitle them to nominate a First and deputy First Minister need to reach an agreement to form an Executive. In this context, I welcome the intensified engagement between the DUP and Sinn Féin as referred to in the statements by party leaders Arlene Foster and Michelle O'Neill on 6 September.

These discussions continue and I believe that all parties are conscious that time cannot be

unlimited in seeking the desired outcome. Northern Ireland has been without an Executive for several months, during the period when the Article 50 negotiations between the EU and the UK are focused 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.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

285. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions he has had recently with the United States authorities in relation to the undocumented Irish; the visa proposals he has put forward that would assist Irish persons that need to have their status regularised in the United States; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39356/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am acutely aware of the very understandable concerns which exist among members of the Irish community in the U.S. in light of recent developments in the area of immigration under the new U.S. Administration. The changed political landscape in the US has resulted in a renewed focus on the plight of the many millions of undocumented people living in the US, including a significant number of Irish citizens.

In order to support people who have those concerns, our Embassy in Washington DC, and our six Consulates across the U.S., continue to work with Irish immigration centres to provide support to undocumented Irish citizens.

Legal advice on the implications of policy developments for undocumented Irish citizens in the U.S, funded by my Department, has been disseminated amongst Irish immigration centres in the United States and is available online.

The Irish 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.

With this in mind, Ireland's diplomatic representatives in the U.S. are continuing to systematically avail of all opportunities to raise the immigration issue in their contacts with the US authorities, including the prospects for immigration reform and the situation of the undocumented.

I am in New York this week for the opening of the UN General Assembly and I will be talking time out of my UN programme to meet with representatives of the four Irish Immigration Centres in the region and a representative of the US-wide Coalition of Irish Immigration Centres. This will be an opportunity for me to hear from those working at the coalface with the undocumented Irish as to the current situation and the problems they are encountering on the ground.

I will also be meeting with a senior State Department official during my time in New York and will use that opportunity to once again impress on the US administration the importance which the Irish Government attaches to a resolution of the plight of the undocumented Irish.

In addition, I plan on travelling to Washington DC next month for a series of high-level

meetings, including with influential friends of Ireland on Capitol Hill, and this issue will again be high on my agenda.

There can be no doubt, then, that the Government remains wholly committed to working with the US authorities to resolve the plight of the undocumented Irish. The Government will continue to articulate to the US authorities our keen interest in this area while respecting the right of the United States to set its own immigration policies.

The Taoiseach raised the issue when he spoke with President Trump by phone shortly after taking office and I know that the Taoiseach looks forward to having an opportunity to discuss this important issue with President Trump in more detail in due course.

The appointment by the Taoiseach of Deputy John Deasy as the Government's Special Envoy to the United States Congress to work for the undocumented Irish is a further statement of our intent and seriousness on this issue.

I can also assure the Deputy of the Government's continued commitment to pursuing these matters on behalf of our affected citizens in the U.S.

Good Friday Agreement

286. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the legal and constitutional obligations that the Government has under the Good Friday Agreement in relation to Northern Ireland and the Border; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39360/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Good Friday Agreement is the foundation of the peace process and provides the detailed framework for all of the Government's engagement in relation to Northern Ireland. The full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent agreements is a priority for the Government.

Following a referendum in 1998, the Nineteenth Amendment of the Constitution was approved, thereby endorsing the Good Friday Agreement. This allowed for the amendment of Articles 2 and 3 and the insertion of Article 29.7 of the Constitution. Article 2 refers to the entitlement and birthright of every person born in the island of Ireland (including its islands and seas) to be part of the Irish nation while Article 3 sets out the principle of consent and the possibility of constitutional change, and refers to the institutions with executive powers and functions on the island. Article 29.7.2 allowed the State to be bound by the British-Irish Agreement and provided that any institution established by or under the Agreement may exercise the powers and functions conferred on it in respect of all or any part of the island of Ireland.

In relation to the border, the Good Friday Agreement includes an obligation on the British Government to return to normal security arrangements in Northern Ireland, including the removal of security installations that were predominantly along the border. As the most obvious symbol of the peace process, the invisible border on the island of Ireland is essential to people's lives and livelihoods and to the continuing normalisation of relationships that is a fundamental part of the peace process founded on the Good Friday Agreement.

As a co-guarantor of the Agreement, the Government will therefore continue to emphasise and pursue Ireland's objective of protecting the gains of the peace process and avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland.

Irish Prisoners Abroad

287. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the case of a person (details supplied) in Egypt in view of the fact that there seemed to be positive progress during July and August 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39414/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am sure that all members of the House joined me on Monday last, 18 September in welcoming the news from Cairo that this young Irish citizen had been acquitted at the conclusion of the trial in which he was a defendant along with almost 500 others. This young man's name has been cleared and his innocence is confirmed.

The Government's priority now is to support this citizen and his family in every way that we can in order to ensure that he is able to return home to his family and friends as soon as possible.

We are conscious that there will be some practical procedures and formalities to be gone through in Egypt before he will be able to fly back to Dublin, but my Department and our Embassy team will be assisting and supporting him and his family to seek to ensure he gets home as soon as possible.

Foreign Conflicts

288. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has discussed with his EU counterparts the situation in Myanmar; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39515/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am deeply concerned by the violence taking place in Rakhine State and reports of serious human rights violations. All perpetrators of violence must be brought to justice in line with the rule of law. The Myanmar security forces involved in ongoing operations have a duty to exercise maximum restraint and to protect unarmed civilians.

The crisis has led to hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians fleeing the country. I urge all sides for a de-escalation of tensions, and full observance of international human rights law. Unrestricted humanitarian access is essential. UN agencies and other humanitarian actors must be allowed to return and resume their operations imminently.

This Government is raising its concerns both through our contacts with the Government of Myanmar, in the context of our EU membership and through participation in UN fora. I have not yet had an opportunity to discuss recent developments in this situation with my EU counterparts. However the ongoing developments and the EU's response has and continues to be discussed in detail at official level in Brussels and in Myanmar since the escalation of violence in Rakhine State on 25 August. I have been briefed on these discussions, and Ireland fully supports the statements made by EU High Representative Mogherini on this issue. We will continue to engage closely with our EU partners on this matter as the situation evolves.

EU Issues

289. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on President Juncker's plan for a more united, stronger and democratic union, in particular

plans in relation to further enhancing subsidiary proportionality and better regulation in the daily operation of the European Union. [39668/17]

290. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the state of the union speech by the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, in the European Parliament on 14 September 2017 (details supplied); and his views on these suggestions. [39798/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 289 and 290 together.

The President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker made his annual State of the Union address to the European Parliament in Strasbourg on Wednesday 13 September. In a wide-ranging speech President Juncker touched on multiple issues on the EU agenda including Climate Change, Trade, Industrial Policy, Migration, the Single Market, the Digital Agenda, the Eurozone, the Schengen Area, Defence and Taxation.

I welcome the positive tone of the speech echoing the Bratislava Declaration of the 27 Heads of State and Government of September last year which acknowledged that while the EU is not perfect, it remains indispensable for its members.

In March this year the European Commission published a White Paper on the Future of the EU. The purpose of the White Paper is to open a wide-ranging debate with citizens, setting out five scenarios for how Europe could evolve by 2025. These five scenarios are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive and in putting them forward the Commission is aiming to move the debate beyond a binary choice between more Europe or less Europe. By opting, in the White Paper, for a wide debate, rather than recommending a clear, integrationist path for the future, the Commission is respecting the need for the EU to rebuild its trust with its citizens. I very much welcome this approach.

Since the publication of the White Paper, the European Commission has further contributed to the debate with five Reflection Papers. Each Paper contains different levels of ambition which broadly reflect the scenarios set out in the White Paper. My colleague the Minister for European Affairs and I are planning to lead a process of public engagement on these and related issues in the coming months. It is imperative that we use our influence to shape the future direction of the European Union. Each Member State, Ireland included, will be bringing its own contributions to the debate.

In his address President Juncker made over 40 proposals. Some of them will enjoy the support of the Government, some will not and others will need further analysis. I welcome, however, the President's emphasis on a Union that works for its citizens and on Europe's values: a Union of freedom, equality and the rule of law. The speech echoes our broad approach to the debate with our commitment to completing the single market, completing the banking union and opening up new markets around the globe. I also agree entirely with President Juncker when he says that "the future of Europe cannot be decided by decree. It has to be the result of democratic debate and, ultimately, broad consensus."

With respect to the President's proposal for a European Defence Union, I can assure the deputy that, under the terms of the Treaty on European Union, a common Union defence would require unanimity in the European Council and would have to be in accordance with the constitutional requirements of Member States. As the Deputy is aware, Ireland's participation in a European Common Defence is prohibited by article 29.4.9 of the Constitution of Ireland. This protection is reinforced by the Irish Protocol to the Lisbon Treaty. Any change in that position could take place only with the approval of the people in a referendum to amend the Constitu-

tion.

In his address the President also asked Member States to look at which foreign policy decisions could be moved from unanimity to qualified majority voting. As he made clear, the Treaty already provides for this, if all Member States agree to it. I can assure the Deputy that we will study any such proposals, if they emerge, very closely to ensure the careful balance enshrined in the Treaty on European Union is fully respected.

Human Rights

291. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the case of a person (details supplied) who went missing after the Argentine security forces evicted a group of the indigenous Mapuche community from their lands in Patagonia due to a dispute with an Italian clothing company (detail supplied); if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that the United Nations committee reported that their disappearance required urgent action by the Administration of Argentina's president, Mauricio Macri; and if he will raise this case with his Argentine counterpart. [39799/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the case to which the Deputy refers, that of Mr. Santiago Maldonado who reportedly disappeared on 1 August in Chubut province.

I understand that the case was raised with the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances by the Centre for Legal and Social Studies of Buenos Aires, and that the Committee has urged the Argentine government to take swift action to locate Mr. Maldonado.

Government officials in Argentina have stated that there is no record of Mr. Maldonado being detained, but that an investigation is ongoing.

I have asked officials at our Embassy in Buenos Aires to monitor the case and to keep me informed of developments.

Question No. 292 answered with Question No. 284.

Organ Removal

293. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the growing market for organ harvesting, particularly in China; if action at EU level has been taken to condemn and combat this growing market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39826/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government follows closely reports of organ harvesting, including renewed allegations of organ harvesting in China. On 6 July this year, officials from my Department met with representatives of the Irish Falun Dafa Association and human rights defenders during which the issue of organ harvesting was discussed.

Trafficking of human organs is a deplorable activity which has developed into a global problem that violates the fundamental human rights and dignity of individuals. International cooperation is the only way to combat this crime, prosecute those behind it and protect vulnerable citizens who may be at risk of becoming victims of trafficking in human organs.

On 8 September this year the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution that aims to strengthen measures and international cooperation in order to prevent and combat trafficking in persons for the purpose of organ removal and trafficking in human organs. Ireland along with most other EU Member States co-sponsored this resolution.

Moreover, Ireland signed the Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Organs in 2015, and will ratify the Convention when the necessary legislation to give effect to the Convention has been put in place. The Department of Health has been scoping the parameters of legislative proposals in this regard. The Government approved the preparation of the General Scheme and Heads of a Human Tissue Bill in July. The General Scheme will include provisions to prohibit the commercialisation of human organs and tissue for transplantation and the trafficking of organs for transplantation.

The Irish Government, together with our EU partners, addresses human rights issues with China, in frequent and regular dialogue, through our contacts in both Dublin and Beijing and through the relevant multilateral channels. It should be noted that China has embarked on reforms in the area of organ donation with a view to stamping out illegal and unethical practices. However, the Embassy of Ireland in Beijing, in cooperation with our EU partners, is monitoring the Chinese reform efforts in the area of organ donation.

Overseas Development Aid

294. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties faced by children with disabilities in the developing world; if Irish Aid is in a position to offer direct support for those with disabilities in view of their specific needs and the fact that NGOs on the ground have pointed out that this group is ten times less likely to attend school in the developing world; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39827/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The Government’s 2013 Policy for International Development, *One World, One Future*, affirms Ireland’s commitment to addressing the rights and needs of vulnerable people, including those with disabilities.

Disability is both a cause and a consequence of poverty. It can magnify existing vulnerabilities among individuals, communities and nations, and people with disabilities are extremely vulnerable to discrimination, physical and sexual abuse and social exclusion. Ireland is committed to addressing the needs of children and other people living with disabilities by continuing and increasing our support to specific initiatives and to ensuring that we mainstream a focus on disability in our relevant programming work.

Ireland works with NGOs, with our developing country partners and with multilateral organisations, including through our humanitarian assistance, to address the needs of people living with disabilities.

Education is one of the most effective ways to break the cycle of discrimination and poverty that children with disabilities often face. In this regard, I note Ireland’s work with, and support to, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) in least developed countries to help build structures and systems focused on keeping children with disabilities in the education system.

Ireland works to assist the empowerment of people with disabilities and their families. In recognition of the fact that women and girls with disabilities are twice as likely to face domestic violence, and three times more likely to suffer sexual violence we also place an emphasis on

initiatives to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities, such as the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women.

Overseas Development Aid Provision

295. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to requests from a group (details supplied), if approval will be given to increase the amount of funding the Government provides in overseas development aid; and if he will ensure that Irish Aid disaggregates the data from all of its projects by age to ensure better planning for the future. [39828/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The Government is strongly committed to Ireland’s Aid Programme, and to its place at the heart of our foreign policy. Our priorities for the Programme are clearly laid out in the Government’s development policy, ‘One World One Future’. The programme has an enviable international reputation and is sharply focused on delivering our goals of reducing poverty and hunger, promoting inclusive and sustainable growth and building more equitable and better systems of governance, particularly in our key partner countries. We have consistently repeated our commitment to providing incremental but sustainable increases to Official Development Assistance (ODA) as economic conditions allow.

As our economic recovery consolidates, we have begun to make good on that commitment and have provided an increase to ODA of €40 million in 2016 and a further €10 million in 2017.

The 2018 Estimates process is now under way. Next year’s budget for ODA, as with allocations to all public expenditure, is ultimately a matter for Government, and must be set in the context of current Government priorities, available resources, and competing budgetary demands. However, I want to assure the Deputy that I, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade will be making the strongest possible case for a continued increase in the allocation to ODA into 2018.

Irish Aid is committed to ensuring high quality monitoring and evaluation systems across all projects and continues to encourage collection of disaggregated data across various vulnerability categories, including age. Detailed budget allocations are made annually across the aid programme in response to existing needs, humanitarian crises and overall programme priorities. Clear criteria are in place to inform the budget allocation process. Sub-Saharan Africa remains our priority region, where we direct assistance to the poorest communities, particularly in our key partner countries. Our aid programme focuses on delivering real and sustainable improvements to the lives of some of the world poorest and most vulnerable people, in the areas of basic health, education, agriculture, and food production.

Human Rights

296. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will request the Saudi and Qatari authorities to withdraw the requirement for exit visas in order to facilitate the return of trapped migrant workers to prevent a humanitarian crisis. [39829/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am very concerned by the difficulties faced by migrant workers in both Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and I strongly deplore any abuses of workers’ rights.

Ireland raises human rights issues regularly in the EU context, in bilateral discussions at every suitable opportunity and we participate fully in the Universal Periodic Review mechanism of the Human Rights Council.

For example, in the context of the Universal Periodic Review of Qatar by the Human Rights Council in 2014, Ireland expressed concerns about widespread reports of violations of the rights of migrant workers, especially in the context of the 2022 World Cup. Ireland expressed particular concerns about the Kafala system of sponsorship, and encouraged Qatar to undertake a thorough review of the regulatory regime for migrant workers, with the aim of bringing it into line with international human rights and labour standards. In addition Ireland recommended that Qatar abolish the ‘exit visa’ system for migrant workers. More recently, Ireland’s Ambassador to Qatar raised these issues directly with the Foreign Ministry of Qatar.

I urge the governments of Qatar and Saudi Arabia to cooperate with the UN and the International Labour Organisation and to work to improve the situation of migrant workers and their families in their respective countries.

Arms Trade

297. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will condemn the growing arms trade which in 2015 exceeded \$1.68 trillion; his views on whether this trade has a detrimental effect, particularly on those in conflict zones and in view of the fact that eight of the top 20 arms selling nations are members of the EU; and if he will progress this worrying trend at European level. [39830/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The unregulated flow of arms has exacerbated regional conflicts, exacted a heavy toll in human suffering, and has deflected resources away from sustainable development. Many of these weapons find their way into the hands of perpetrators through illicit channels, helped by inadequate (or inadequately enforced) laws and weak control mechanisms at national and local levels.

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which came into force in 2014, is the first legally binding instrument to regulate the international trade in conventional weapons. States which sign up to the Treaty are prohibited from exporting arms to countries if they know those weapons will be used to commit gross violations of human rights.

Ireland, as one of the first countries to sign and ratify the Arms Trade Treaty, has been a strong and consistent supporter of the Treaty. The ATT, properly implemented, can represent a major step forward in the international community’s efforts to regulate the international trade in Conventional Weapons.

Since the Treaty’s adoption, 92 States are now a party to the Treaty and a further 41 countries are signatory states to the Treaty. All EU Member States have signed and ratified the Treaty and the EU, including its individual Member States, provide significant support and funding to help realise the Treaty’s aims.

Further, the ATT now counts 12 out of the world’s 20 largest exporters of conventional arms as States Parties. However there is still progress to be made. Ireland regularly encourages all States who have not yet acceded to the Treaty as full members to do so. We also participate actively in EU demarches to non-members on this issue and will continue to do so.

Moreover, Ireland regularly provides financial assistance to the Voluntary Trust Fund, a vital mechanism which provides assistance to States in terms of universalisation and the effective

implementation of the Treaty.

In addition to the ATT, the EU has a range of sanctions in place in respect of countries engaged in conflicts. All licence applications for exports are considered having regard to these measures. Sanctions can include arms embargoes and various restrictive measures including prohibitions on the provision of targeted goods and services.

My Department will continue to support the implementation of effective controls to regulate the international arms trade. My officials and I will continue to highlight the detrimental impact that the unregulated flow of arms can cause as we did most recently at the annual Conference of States Parties to the ATT.

Public Services Card

298. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 482 of 11 September 2017, the level of security that is not in the issuing of passports but that is in the issuing of the public services card; his views on the security of passports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39866/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Irish passport has a strong international reputation due to the strength of security features within the book and the robust process involved in its issuance. This allows Irish citizens the freedom to visit over 170 countries without applying for a visa.

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.

Before issuing a passport to a person, the Minister must be satisfied, among other things, as to the identity of the person. Under the Act, the Minister may require an applicant to provide such information or documents as required to establish his/her identity. It is in keeping with our commitment to upholding the integrity and security of the Irish passport and to combat passport fraud that robust systems and procedures are in place for verification of identity.

The Public Services Card (“PSC”) issued by the Department of Social Protection under their SAFE process is an added practical and effective protection against fraud and identity theft.

As previously set out, the Passport Service currently requires the PSC for first time adult applicants and for applicants seeking to replace lost, stolen or damaged passports that were issued prior to 2005. Further, the Government decided on 17 July 2017 that the PSC will be required for all passport applications made in the State by the end of 2018.

For security and operational reasons, I cannot set out all the verification checks carried out internally in the Passport Office on applications received.

As previously stated, 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.

Brexit Negotiations

299. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the Brexit negotiations. [39657/17]

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, the focus has been on the withdrawal issues of citizens' rights, the financial settlement, other more technical "separation" issues and the issues unique to Ireland. 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 several issues have been reasonably 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 and indeed has argued that its obligations are moral, not legal.

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 to 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 sectorial 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 the 27 EU Member States.

We are 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 at our meeting on 4 September 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, the High Level Dialogue between the UK and EU teams is making some headway. Good progress has been made on the recognition of a continuation of 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 paper on the "*Guiding Principles for the dialogue on Ireland/Northern Ireland*" on 7 September. The paper builds on the Euro-

pean 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. We will continue to work closely with Mr Barnier and his team to advance Ireland's concerns in these negotiations.

Northern Ireland

300. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the reinstatement of the civic forum is part of the discussions for the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly. [39903/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Good Friday Agreement provided for the establishment of a civic forum to act as a consultative mechanism on social, economic and cultural issues in Northern Ireland. A civic forum was set up in 2000 and met on a number of occasions but was suspended following the collapse of the political institutions in October 2002. Following the restoration of devolved government in 2007, a review of the Forum was announced by the new Executive but was not re-established.

In addressing outstanding commitments, the parties to the Stormont House Agreement in 2014 agreed that it was important that civic voices be heard and their views considered in relation to key social, cultural and economic issues. A new model was envisaged through the establishment of a compact civic advisory panel, to meet regularly and to advise the Northern Ireland Executive. Under the Fresh Start Agreement of November 2015, the parties committed to the establishment of a compact civic advisory panel.

On 6 December 2016, the then First and deputy First Ministers announced the formation of this civic advisory panel. The role of the 6-person panel is to consider specific issues relevant to the Executive's Programme for Government and engage with civic society stakeholders. This panel will report to the Executive and may also propose subjects it wishes to consider.

The establishment of the civic advisory panel by the last Northern Ireland Executive was very welcome, as it fulfilled a provision under the Stormont House and Fresh Start Agreements. However, in the absence of an Executive, the civic advisory panel is unable to operate effectively.

The Government is determined, as co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, to 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.

Garda Commissioner Retirement

301. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he or his officials were informed regarding the Garda Commissioner's intention to apply for the head of Europol vacancy. [39033/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The former Commissioner did indicate that she was giving consideration to applying for a position in Europol.

However, in a statement issued on the occasion of her retirement she stated that she did not proceed with the application.

Immigrant Investor Programme Eligibility

302. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if Irish family owned businesses can involve an immigrant investor in the company; and the requirements for such a development. [39288/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the Immigrant Investor Programme (IIP) is open to non-EEA nationals and their families who commit to an approved investment in Ireland. The IIP criteria requires that the investment has to be good for Ireland, good for jobs and in the public interest, the funds invested have to be legally acquired and owned by the investor (i.e. not borrowed). There is nothing to exclude an Investment being made to a family run business once the criteria of the programme are met.

Further details and the relevant application form is available on the INIS Website *www.inis.gov.ie*.

Road Traffic Offences Data

303. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of daily checks that are carried out on drivers using bus lanes illegally. [39475/17]

304. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of fines that are issued daily to drivers using bus lanes illegally. [39476/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 303 and 304 together.

I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to these matters and I will contact the Deputy directly when the information is to hand.

UN Conventions Ratification

305. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the State will ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39761/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy Finian McGrath): Ireland signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007 and since then, successive Governments have emphasised Ireland's strong commitment to proceed to ratification as quickly as possible, taking into account the need to ensure all necessary legislative and administrative requirements under the Convention are met. This Government remains committed to ratification of the Convention.

It is essential that the State is in a position to meet the obligations that it assumes under the terms of an international agreement from the moment of its entry into force for Ireland. Before the State can ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, enactment of

new legislation and amendment of existing legislation is required to ensure obligations will be met upon entry into force for Ireland. Ratification of a Convention before we have amended domestic legislation that contradicts it makes no sense and does nothing to ensure compliance or to protect the people for whose benefit the Convention exists. The previous Government published a Roadmap in October 2015, which sets out the legislative measures needed to meet those requirements, along with declarations and reservations to be entered by Ireland on ratification.

Considerable progress has already been made to overcome the remaining legislative barriers to Ireland's ratification of the Convention. The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 was signed into law on 30 December 2015 and is a comprehensive reform of the law on decision-making capacity. The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 has reformed Section 5 of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 1993 to facilitate the full participation in family life of persons with intellectual disabilities and the full expression of their human rights.

The Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2016 was published immediately prior to Christmas and completed Second Stage in February 2017. The primary purpose of the Bill is to address the remaining legislative barriers to Ireland's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Work is ongoing on all the other issues set out in the previous Government's Roadmap for Ratification published in October 2015 and these will be progressed as Committee Stage amendments. The Bill will be progressed to enactment at an early date to facilitate ratification of the UN Convention as soon as possible.

The precise timing of ratification now depends on how long it will take for this Bill to progress through the enactment process and on issues in relation to commencement both of deprivation of liberty provisions, which will be included in the Bill at Committee Stage, and of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015.

The major issue at this stage is in relation to deprivation of liberty – in the case of persons in nursing homes for example, whose capacity to consent may be in doubt. This is a sensitive and important issue and we must get it right. Unfortunately, it is taking longer than expected to develop a proposal that is constitutionally sound and operationally effective and reasonable. The Department of Justice and Equality continues to engage with the Department of Health to assist with that work, but there is still some work to be done.

While Ireland's not having ratified the CRPD is a recurring point of criticism by the UN as well as by domestic civil society and NGOs, it should be noted that in terms of quality of service and the actual position of people with disabilities in society, Ireland is in many respects in advance of other EU states. This is not to be complacent and we are continuing to take practical measures to improve the lives of people with disabilities. The Report of the Make Work Pay Group was published earlier this year and already action, as announced by Minister Harris has been taken on its recommendations. We have a Comprehensive Employment Strategy in place and the Government recently published a new National Disability Inclusion Strategy (2017 – 2021). This strategy contains a wide range of practical commitments to improve the position of people with disabilities.

I would like to take this opportunity to assure the Deputy that ratification of the UNCRPD remains a very high priority for me as Minister.

Road Traffic Offences Data

306. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parlia-

mentary Question Nos. 384 and 400 of 13 July 2017, if he will contact An Garda Síochána and request the furnishing of the information without further delay (details supplied). [39112/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested another update from the Garda authorities in relation to the matters raised and I will contact the Deputy directly when this information is to hand.

Garda Station Closures

307. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a decision will be made on the reopening of Rush Garda station with regard to the pilot scheme to reopen six Garda stations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39116/17]

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.

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.

Garda Operations

308. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the measures he plans to take following the Europol report that shows Ireland as third highest in the European Union for reports that specifically relate to the suspected financing of terrorism. [39122/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The very high level of reporting identified in the Europol report reflects the importance of the Irish financial services sector and the high volume of international transactions passing through it.

While all such reports are followed up by an Garda Síochána, the overwhelming majority prove, on investigation, to have no links of concern.

In order to reinforce this investigative capacity, additional resources have also been allocated to the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) within An Garda Síochána with the introduction of 'goAML' on 12th June 2017.

goAML is an IT software solution specifically designed by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) for use by FIUs throughout the world, which ensures the filtering of Suspicious Transaction Reports to identify potential links to Terrorist Financing.

The FIU now requires reporting entities to state what the “Report Indicator” is when completing an STR on goAML. Terrorist Financing is one of these indicators and ensures that each STR with this report indicator of Terrorist Financing receives a higher priority.

It should also be noted that An Garda Síochána have achieved a number of well publicised successes in recent months utilising security and operational intelligence to disrupt terrorist activities which serve to further demonstrate the effectiveness of on-going counter-terrorism and TF investigations.

Closed-Circuit Television Systems

309. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the person or body that owns CCTV hardware at a location (details supplied); the person or body that is responsible for the monitoring and recording; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39125/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, my Department is currently administering a new grant-aid scheme to assist community groups in the establishment of community-based CCTV systems. Under the scheme, eligible community groups can apply for grant-aid of up to 60% of the total capital cost of a proposed CCTV system, up to a maximum grant of €40,000.

Full details of the scheme, including guidelines, application forms, code of practice and other relevant documentation are all available from my Department’s website and I would strongly encourage interested groups to avail of the scheme.

I would draw the attention of the Deputy to section 38(3)(C) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005, which makes provision for the authorisation by the Garda Commissioner of CCTV Schemes that meet the established criteria and where the application for authorisation has been approved by the relevant local authority after consulting with the joint policing committee for the administrative area concerned.

Given the pivotal roles of the local authority and joint policing committee in the statutory framework, the Deputy will appreciate that, as Minister, I have no function in relation to the matter. Rather, it would seem that the question of ownership and operation of the CCTV hardware referred to by the Deputy would be a matter for the local authority concerned.

Departmental Reports

310. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when he received the Murray report; and when he plans to publish it. [39134/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The former Chief Justice, Mr. John L. Murray, was commissioned in January 2016 to examine the legislative framework in respect of access by statutory bodies to communications data of journalists held by communications service providers, taking into account the principle of protection of journalistic sources; the need for statutory bodies with investigative and /or prosecution powers to have access to data in order to prevent and detect serious crime; and current best international practice in this area.

Mr. Justice Murray's report sets out a very detailed and comprehensive analysis of the law in what is a complex and evolving area of law. On receipt of the report in April 2017 it was forwarded to the Attorney General for consideration and advice, against the background of recent findings in this area of the law by the Court of Justice of the European Union. Mr. Justice Murray has taken account of those findings in his review.

Detailed advice has been received and it is now being considered in the context of an ongoing assessment of the need for measures to address the findings of the Court of Justice. Following that, the report will be brought to the Government with a view to its publication.

Garda Vetting

311. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to revise the current Garda vetting process for substitute teaching positions requiring that candidates undergo Garda vetting requirements in order to simplify the relevant procedures with the view to minimising, in so far as possible and without diminishing the robust and crucial scrutiny of candidates, the administrative burden which is placed on candidates that are required to complete and return the necessary paperwork for each individual post for which they apply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39149/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the primary purpose of the employment vetting carried out by the Garda National Vetting Bureau is to seek to ensure the safety of children and vulnerable adults and it is carried out by An Garda Síochána primarily in accordance with the provisions of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012-2016. There are no current plans to revise the legislation or the vetting process in relation to substitute teaching positions.

Vetting checks are conducted by the Garda National Vetting Bureau for each new vetting application received to ensure that the most recent data available is taken into account. This is because once there has been any significant lapse of time between one employment and another, the original vetting disclosure must be reviewed to take account of any changes in information, such as more recent criminal convictions. Furthermore, the Data Protection Acts require that any sensitive personal data which employers use in regard to their employees must be current, accurate and up-to-date. Importantly, the general non-transferability and contemporaneous nature of the current process also helps to protect against the risk of fraud or forgery in the process.

I am pleased to inform that Deputy that at present, 80% of overall vetting applications are being processed by the National Vetting Bureau in five working days. This efficiency has been achieved by the deployment of the e-Vetting system which facilitates the on-line processing of applications for vetting from registered organisations. The e-Vetting system is available to all registered organisations and the Garda Authorities are ready to assist those organisations who are not yet using the e-Vetting system to do so. In circumstances where there is such a sustained reduction in processing times, the issue of vetting "transferability" is largely obviated.

That said, there are certain limited circumstances where organisations can share a single vetting disclosure where this is agreed to by the vetting applicant. Section 12(3)(A) of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 (as amended) provides that two or more relevant organisations can enter into a joint written agreement in relation to the employment, contracting, permitting or placement of a person to undertake relevant work or activities thereby providing for only one of the organisations being required to conduct vetting in respect of that person.

Visa Applications

312. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a person (details supplied) can have their GNIB number registered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39166/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the applicant is currently in the State on a short stay 'C' visa for the purpose of a visit.

The maximum permitted stay on a 'C' visa is 90 days. Registration of permission to be in the State is required for non-EEA nationals who are resident in the State for longer than 90 days, in accordance with the Immigration Act 2004. Holders of short stay 'C' visit visas cannot stay in the State for longer than 90 days, therefore it is not the practice of INIS or the Garda National Immigration Bureau to register such individuals.

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.

Garda Operations

313. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the sums allocated to cover the costs of the Commission on the Future of Policing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39194/17]

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 in April 2017 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 10 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 also 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.

For an update on the work of the Commission, I refer the Deputy to the press release issued by the Commission on 1 September, available on the Commission website www.policereform.ie, which sets out the approach being undertaken by the Commission in progressing work under its terms of reference.

Following the establishment of the Commission my Department engaged with the Chairperson and secretariat in relation to its budgetary needs and subsequently obtained sanction from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for the amount sought of €1.5m. This budget includes all cost components for the Commission including remuneration of the members, the costs of the secretariat, the conduct of an extensive consultation process as required by the terms of reference, and other operating costs considered necessary and appropriate for the Commission to fulfil its remit.

Garda Operations

314. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the measures that have been taken to combat digital fraud on persons' mobile phones; and if he will compel communication providers to take a more active role in blocking these fraudulent phone numbers. [39234/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to these matters and I will contact the Deputy directly when the information is to hand.

Family Reunification Applications

315. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for family reunification in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39261/17]

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

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.

Prison Education Service

316. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of prisoners actively following a course with a university (details supplied) at present in each institution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39276/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Prison Service that the number of people in custody actively following a course with a university at present in each institution are provided in following table.

-	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Arbour Hill	7	8	5
Castlerea	4	1	2
Cloverhill	0	0	0
Cork	2	3	1
Dochas	4	3	2
Limerick	3	3	2
Loughan House	8	12	5
Midlands	3	3	3
Mountjoy	5	3	5
Mountjoy West	0	4	4
Portlaoise	6	5	10
Shelton Abbey	2	0	1
Training Unit	4	1	1
Wheatfield	6	7	6
Total	54	53	47

Prison Service

317. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the date on which a planned review of the Irish Prison Service's national incentivised regimes policy will be completed; the tendering process of this review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39277/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Prison Service that the Incentivised Regimes Policy was introduced on a phased basis across all prisons in 2012 and is now operational in all institutions. The Incentivised Regimes Policy, provides for differentiation of privileges between prisoners according to their level of engagement with services and quality of behaviour. The objective is to provide tangible incentives to prisoners to participate in structured activities and to reinforce good behaviour, leading to a safer and more secure environment.

There are three levels of privilege - basic, standard and enhanced, with different criteria and privileges associated with each level of regime. The list of privileges additional to core privileges varies between prisons, and within different areas of a prison, depending on the operational and infrastructure requirements of each prison. Experience in other jurisdictions has shown that a tiered incentivised regime structure is a hugely valuable addition to prisons in the context of maintaining good order, and in motivating prisoners to engage in constructive activities. Since the introduction of the Incentivised Regimes Programme, the Irish Prison Service has witnessed a considerable reduction in assaults in prisons. Incentivised Regimes is part of a multifaceted approach to improving outcomes for prisoners by promoting the benefits of active participation in their own rehabilitation and behavioural reform.

The Irish Prison Service is committed to working to ensure the continuing integrity of the Incentivised Regimes Policy and is currently finalising arrangements for the conducting of a review.

It is not intended to tender for an external review of the Incentivised Regimes Programme at this time. The Irish Prison Service in partnership with the Prison Officers' Association are finalising terms of reference and a research plan to conduct a detailed review of practices and procedures in prisons to inform future development of the policy, supporting systems and staff training. It is intended to invite an independent academic research partner with a demonstrated background in criminal justice to participate in the steering group for this review.

Citizenship Applications

318. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there is a public register of post-nuptial citizenship certificates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39293/17]

319. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the register for post-nuptial citizenship is available for public inspection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39294/17]

320. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the exact date that his Department started issuing post-nuptial certificates for citizenship; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39295/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 318 to 320, inclusive, together.

The acquisition of Irish citizenship on marriage (post nuptial citizenship) was provided for under Section 8 of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956. This provision was however repealed under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 2001 with effect from 30 November 2002, but with the saver that the provision would continue to apply to a person being a non-national who, before 30 November 2002, marries a person who is, or who after the marriage becomes, an Irish citizen (otherwise than by naturalisation, post nuptial citizenship or as a token

of honour) and who makes a declaration of post nuptial citizenship before 30 November 2005.

The 2001 Act also amended the 1956 Act by the inclusion of a new Section 15A which provided that the Minister may, in his absolute discretion, grant a certificate of naturalisation to a spouse of an Irish citizen providing certain statutory conditions, such as residency requirements, are met. This Section was further amended in 2011 to include civil partners of an Irish citizen.

I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the exact date on which post nuptial certificates first issued is not available, nor is there a public register of post nuptial certificates issued.

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.

Naturalisation Certificates

321. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the legislative basis for certificates (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39297/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The issuing of certificates of naturalisation is provided for under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. I have no role or function in the issuing of birth or death certificates, which is provided for under Section 61 of the Civil Registration Act 2004 which is the responsibility of my colleague the Minister for Health.

Asylum Seeker Accommodation

322. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the arrangements that have been made in relation to the provision of alternative accommodation for the residents of a centre (details supplied) in view of the fact that approval has been given to change the centre into apartments; the consultation which has taken place between the management of the centre, the Reception and Integration Agency, RIA, and the residents; when the residents were informed of this decision; the timeline for the implementation of the plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39462/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The Department of Justice and Equality has a contract in place with the owners of the premises in question to provide accommodation to those seeking international protection. This contract is scheduled to expire on 22nd May 2018. At that time it is expected that all new accommodation contracts will be awarded through an open competitive 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).

It is a matter for the current holders of contracts for the provision of accommodation and related services whether they will participate in this tendering process. The Department will ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place if the relocation of residents is required following the completion of the tendering process.

In the meantime it would not be productive to engage in speculation about what may or may not happen at the time of that competitive process.

Child Custody and Access

323. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39489/17]

325. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the sanctions that can be imposed on a parent who persistently, frequently and repeatedly frustrates, denies or cancels a child's court ordered access with his or her other parent to ensure that the child is not alienated from his or her other parent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39497/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 323 and 325 together.

I do not propose to introduce legislation to provide for equal shared parenting as this may not be in the best interests of the child in every family situation, and particularly in cases where domestic violence is involved.

Section 11 of the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964 provides that either parent of a child, whether or not he or she is also a guardian of the child, may apply to court for a direction regarding the custody of a child or the right of access to the child.

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

The law places an emphasis on recognising the rights of the child to the society of both his or her parents. Section 11D of the 1964 Act obliges the court in proceedings under section 11 to consider whether the child's best interests would be served by maintaining personal relations and direct contact with each of his or her parents on a regular basis.

Section 25 of the 1964 Act also requires the court, as it thinks appropriate and practicable, to take into account the child's wishes in custody and access matters, having regard to the age and understanding of the child.

Section 12A of the 1964 Act (inserted by section 58 of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015) provides that in making any order under the Act, the court may impose such conditions as it considers to be necessary in the best interests of the child.

It is a matter for the courts when making orders under the 1964 Act in relation to matters such as the guardianship, custody or upbringing of, or access to, a child to consider whether or not any conditions should be attached to such orders. I have no role in the consideration of cases or the making of court orders, as this is a function of the courts, which are, subject to the Constitution and the law, independent in the performance of their functions.

The Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 made provision to assist parents who need to return to court because the other parent has breached a court order in relation to custody of or access to a child. Section 56 of the 2015 Act inserted a new section 18A into the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964. This provides that where a parent or guardian of a child has been granted custody of or access to the child under the 1964 Act, but he or she has been unreasonably denied such custody or access by another guardian or parent, that person may apply to court for an

enforcement order. Under section 18A(4) of the 1964 Act, it is a matter for the courts to decide on the terms of any enforcement order and I have no role in such matters.

Child Custody and Access

324. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to ratify EU resolution 2079 (2015) concerning equality and shared parental responsibility: the role of father, in order to remove from family law the difference based on marital status between parents who have acknowledged their child (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39495/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Married parents of a child are automatically joint guardians and have joint custody of their children. Where married parents separate or divorce, they can decide between themselves on custody arrangements for their children or apply to the courts to decide on the matter.

If the father is not married to the mother of the child, he will not automatically become a guardian of the child. The issue of automatic guardianship was considered during the passage of the Children and Family Relationships Bill through the Oireachtas. However the automatic extension of guardianship to a father who is not involved and is not participating in his child's life would have consequences for the child and the child's mother, for example, if he does not consent to the issue of a passport or to the placement of a child for adoption.

There are provisions in place to facilitate non-marital fathers who have an ongoing relationship with their children to become guardians of their children. Section 2(4A) of the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964 (as inserted by section 43(c) of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015) now provides for joint guardianship by a man who was not married to the mother of the child and was cohabiting with the mother for not less than 12 consecutive months. This 12 month period must include a period, occurring at any time after the birth of the child, of not less than three months during which both the mother and father have lived with the child. In addition, a father who is not married to the child's mother and does not satisfy the cohabitation requirements may become a guardian if the parents jointly make a statutory declaration appointing him as a guardian. It is also open to the father at any stage to make an application to court for guardianship of the child under section 6A of the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964.

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

The majority of court applications for guardianship made by fathers are granted. In 2015, the most recent year for which full figures are available, the District Court determined 2,367 guardianship applications of which over 76% were granted.

I am aware of resolution 2079 (2015) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe concerning equality and shared parental responsibility and of the Parliamentary Assembly's request at point 5.4 that member states remove from their laws any difference based on marital status between parents who have acknowledged their child. I have no plans at present

for further amendment of the Guardianship of Infants Act 1964 to provide for automatic guardianship for unmarried fathers, but the operation of the law in this area is kept under ongoing review by my Department.

Question No. 325 answered with Question No. 323.

Deportation Orders Re-examination

326. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will review on humanitarian grounds the decision to deport in the case of a person (details supplied) who is wheelchair bound; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39512/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): A Deportation Order was signed in respect of the person referred to by the Deputy on 9 June 2017. Leave was granted by the High Court on 17 July 2017 to take Judicial Review proceedings seeking to quash the Deportation Order. Accordingly, as the matter is *sub judice*, I do not propose to comment further.

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

Garda Training

327. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí that have taken either the level 4 or level 5 Garda driving course in 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017; the length of time the course lasts; the frequency with which courses are held; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39513/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for carrying on and managing and controlling generally the administration and business of An Garda Síochána including by arranging for the training of the members and civilian staff of An Garda Síochána and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

I am informed by the Commissioner that there is a five level suite of competency based driving (CBD) courses, with each level specifically catering for the required knowledge base, skill set and operational requirements of members undergoing the relevant training.

The five level suite covers the initial assessment of driving suites at CBD 1 to advanced driving training which includes the highest level of knowledge of road craft and all competency areas necessary to drive high powered vehicles at CBD 4 and the training of Garda driving instructors at CBD 5. I am further informed that the frequency of courses is governed by the operational requirements of An Garda Síochána. The highest level of operational requirement is for levels CBD 1 to CBD 3, while the more specialised levels CBD 4 and CBD 5 are held as needed.

I have requested the specific information sought by the Deputy from the Garda Commissioner and when it is to hand I will write to the Deputy directly.

Garda Transport Provision

328. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to provide funding for the purchase of extra unmarked Garda cars and extra marked Garda vans for the Garda Traffic Corps; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39514/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the allocation of Garda resources in the State, including vehicles to the Garda Traffic Corps, in light of identified operational demands and the availability of resources. As Minister, I have no direct role in the matter.

The Deputy will be aware that there has been unprecedented investment in the Garda Fleet in recent years with some €46 million being invested over the lifetime of the Government's Capital Plan 2016 - 2021 to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit for purpose fleet. This is in addition to the investment of some €30 million between 2013 and 2015.

In the period 2013 to end of 2017, almost €44 million will have been invested in the Garda fleet with some 2,000 vehicles coming on stream in that period.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the Garda Traffic Corps currently comprises 281 vehicles, including 18 vehicles that were allocated to the Corps in 2017. I understand that a further 19 vehicles are scheduled to be allocated to the Corps following delivery and fit out.

Prison Service Staff

329. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the application procedure for a prison officer post; the reason a person working in the prison service in the UK who has the relevant qualifications for the UK prison service cannot be afforded an interview here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39570/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been advised by the Irish Prison Service that the recruitment process for the position of Recruit Prison Officer is outlined in the Recruit Prison Officer Information Booklet which issues at the initial stage of a Recruit Prison Officer campaign, the most recent of which commenced in 2016. The process consists of completion of an application form, Stage 1 unsupervised on-line assessments, Stage 2 supervised on-line assessments and Stage 3 interview and other assessments. Candidates who qualify at Stage 3 and whose place on the order of merit is reached will go forward to Stage 4 for consideration by the Irish Prison Service. Stages 1, 2 and 3 of the selection process are conducted by the Public Appointments Service.

As the Deputy will understand, it is of the utmost importance to ensure fairness and transparency for all candidates involved in a recruitment campaign. Therefore, all candidates must successfully complete each and every stage of the recruitment process as outlined above in order to progress to the next stage.

Insolvency Service of Ireland

330. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will respond to a matter raised in correspondence (details supplied) which could have a significant effect on the operation of the insolvency service. [39577/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am aware of the matters raised in the correspondence to the Deputy, and my officials have arranged to meet shortly in this regard with representatives of those concerned.

I can reassure the Deputy that I do not, at this point, regard these matters as raising systemic consequences for the personal insolvency court review process.

I am advised that the issue raised in the Court decision mentioned appears to be primarily a procedural one: and that the Court held that the application in this particular case had not been brought in the form prescribed by the Circuit Court Rules, and that the correct form must be used.

The Insolvency Service of Ireland, which is the regulatory body for Personal Insolvency Practitioners, has since issued reminder guidance on the procedures which must be followed.

As the Deputy will be aware, section 115A(1) of the Personal Insolvency Acts provides (emphasis added) that:

‘... the personal insolvency practitioner may, where he or she considers that there are reasonable grounds for the making of such an application and if the debtor so instructs him or her in writing, make an application on behalf of the debtor to the appropriate court for an order under subsection (9).’

In relation to the concerns raised, the Deputy will be aware that it would be highly unusual, in any proceedings, for a Court to award costs against a professional representative (solicitor, accountant, personal insolvency practitioner...) who acts in those proceedings on behalf of his or her client.

For the Deputy’s information, the High Court has already considered this issue. For example, in *Nugent, a debtor, and the Personal Insolvency Acts (no 2)* (Baker J, 8 June 2016), the High Court held that *‘the PIP is properly characterised as a non-party for the purposes of considering whether costs should be awarded against him. The PIP has a central role in the procedures under the legislation, but he has no personal interest in the result and any order that is made under the legislation is made for the benefit of, or affects, the debtor in his personal capacity, and not the PIP.’*

The Court indicated that it was only in very exceptional circumstances, such as where the person concerned had acted *mala fide*, that it would consider making any such award.

Criminal Prosecutions Data

331. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons that have been prosecuted before the courts in 2017 under sections 3 and 15, respectively, of the Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Act 2016; the way in which this compares with figures for the past four years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39593/17]

332. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons that have been convicted before the courts in 2017 under sections 3 and 15, respectively, of the Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Act 2016; the way in which this compares with figures for the past four years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39594/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 331 and 332 together.

I am assuming that the Deputy is referring to the relevant sections of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977, as amended. Section 3 relates to restriction on possession of controlled drugs and Section 15 relates to possession of controlled drugs for unlawful sale or supply.

The information requested by the Deputy has been sought from the Courts Service and I will further advise in this regard when the material is to hand.

Crime Prevention

333. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the way in which An Garda Síochána is tackling boy racing or young drivers, in particular young male drivers who race on roads late at night; the deterrents that are in place; the number of convictions to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39611/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I share the Deputy's concerns in relation to the serious public safety and anti-social issues associated with the misuse of vehicles.

To be of assistance to the Deputy, I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to this matter and I will contact him directly when the information is to hand.

Substance Misuse

334. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the growth of drug abuse in Cork city; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39612/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy may be aware, "Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery" - A health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017 – 2025 was launched by the Taoiseach on 17 July 2017. The Minister of State for Health Promotion and the National Drugs Strategy, Catherine Byrne T.D., has responsibility for the Government's health-led response outlined in the new strategy to addressing the harm caused by substance misuse in our society over the next eight years. One of the objectives under the strategy is concerned with supporting high quality monitoring, evaluation and research to ensure evidence-informed policies and practice.

I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to the Deputy's question and I will further advise in this regard when the report is to hand.

Garda Data

335. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí and the ranks of each in Cork city; the number of vacancies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39613/17]

340. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of uniformed members of An Garda Síochána that have been removed from front-line duties in Cork city; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39748/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 335 and 340 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. 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 am further informed that the number of Gardaí assigned to the Cork City Division on the 31 July 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 657 with 45 Garda Reserves and 63 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 200 recruits will attest this coming Friday with another 200 scheduled to attest 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, including the Cork City Division in the coming years.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the strength of the Cork City Division on 31 July 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, is as set out in the following table.

CORK CITY DIVISION JULY 2017

DISTRICT	STATION	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	TOTAL
ANGLESEA STREET	ANGLESEA STREET	232	41	10	4	1	1	289
	BLACKROCK	19	3					22
	BRIDEWELL	22	6					28
	TOTAL	273	50	10	4	1	1	339

Questions - Written Answers

DISTRICT	STATION	GD	SG	IN	SU	CS	AC	TOTAL
GUR-RANABRAHER	BALLINCOLLIG	16	2					18
	BLARNEY	15	2					17
	CARRIG NA BHFEAR	1						1
	GUR-RANABRAHER	49	5	1				55
	TOTAL	81	9	1				91
MAYFIELD	GLANMIRE	18	4					22
	MAYFIELD	36	6	1	1			44
	WATER-COURSE ROAD	37	9					46
	TOTAL	91	19	1	1			112
TOGHER	BISHOP-STOWN	16	4					20
	CARRIGALINE	17	3					20
	CROSSHAVEN	2						2
	DOUGLAS	15	4					19
	PASSAGE WEST	1	1					2
	TOGHER	44	7		1			52
	TOTAL	95	19		1			115
CORK CITY TOTAL		540	97	12	6	1	1	657

Deportation Orders Re-examination

336. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an appeal in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39712/17]

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

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

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

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.

Garda Vetting Applications

337. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason Garda vetting for a person (details supplied) has taken over one year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39730/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will know, I have contacted his office to request additional information in respect of the person who is the subject of his question in order to be in a position to make enquiries with the Garda Authorities. When the information has been provided, I will make the necessary enquiries regarding this vetting application and revert directly to the Deputy when they have been completed.

Property Services Regulatory Authority Remit

338. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will consider including owners' management companies under the regulation of the PSRA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39732/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The primary function of the Property Services Regulatory Authority (PSRA) established under the Property Services (Regulation) Act 2011 is to control and supervise the provision of property services in the State, including auctioneering and letting services and property management services. For this purpose, the Authority operates a licensing system for property services providers, namely auctioneers, letting agents and property management agents. The owners management companies (OMCs) for whom property management agents provide management services are companies established under the Companies Acts and are subject to oversight by the Companies Registration Office and the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement. As OMCs are essentially procurers rather than providers of property management services, to extend the role of the PSRA to such companies would not be appropriate or feasible and could be regarded as a conflict of interest for the Authority in exercising its regulatory functions.

Property Services Regulation

339. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if an owners' management company for a multi-unit development and the management agent are allowed to have the same directors and effectively be the same company; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39733/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that I am not in a position in my capacity as Minister for Justice and Equality to provide legal advice on such a matter in response to a parliamentary question. By way of general information, I can, however, state that an Owners' Management Company (OMC) in a multi-unit development is a company registered under the Companies Acts and that general rules relating to directors of such companies are set out in those Acts and the Articles of Association of the OMC concerned.

Under section 43 of the Property Services (Regulation) Act 2011, a person providing a property service, such as a managing agent, must enter into a letter of engagement with a client such as an OMC. The letter of engagement outlines the service to be provided by the managing agent and must be signed, where the managing agent is a company, by two directors of the managing agent and two directors of the OMC. Section 17 of the Multi-Unit Developments Act 2011 provides that, as part of the annual report of the OMC, details of contracts entered into by the company must be given to members and the OMC must hold a meeting at least once a year to consider the report. It is, of course, open to any member of the company to raise any concerns they may have regarding any contract with the OMC or at the annual meeting.

One further aspect to note is that section 32 of the Multi-Unit Developments Act 2011 places restrictions on OMCs entering into long term contracts with providers of goods and services. An OMC is not permitted to enter into contracts for a period in excess of 3 years.

Question No. 340 answered with Question No. 335.

Courts Service Data

341. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons that have been charged before the Special Criminal Court in 2017; and the number of persons charged before the Special Criminal Court in each year since 2000. [39752/17]

342. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons charged before the Special Criminal Court each year since 2000; the number charged with scheduled offences under the Offences Against the State Acts; and the number charged with non-scheduled offences. [39753/17]

343. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons convicted in the Special Criminal Court in each year since 2000. [39754/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 341 to 343, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions, which include the provision of information on the courts system.

I wish to inform the Deputy that available statistics in regard to the Special Criminal Court are published by the Courts Service each year in its Annual Report.

The Courts Service has informed me that it is currently examining the specific information sought by the Deputy, to the extent that it is available, and I will respond to the Deputy in this regard as soon as possible.

Criminal Prosecutions Data

344. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the conviction rate for contested cases in the Special Criminal Court; and if he will provide comparative figures on the conviction rate for contested cases in the Circuit Criminal Court and the Central Criminal Court. [39755/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions, which include the provision of information on the courts system.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that the information on such matters, to the extent available, is being compiled. I will respond to the Deputy as soon as that information has been compiled.

Courts Service Data

345. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the average length of time for a case to be heard before the Special Criminal Court from the point at which a person is charged; and the way in which this compares with the Central Criminal Court and the Circuit Criminal Courts. [39756/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions, which include the provision of information on the courts system.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that the Courts Service does not record a case from the charge date but from the date a case is lodged in court. Waiting time is defined as the time between court offices being notified that a case is ready to proceed to trial and the actual date for the hearing of a trial.

The Courts Service has also informed me that the current average waiting time in the Special Criminal Courts is 12.5 months, which is a significant reduction on the previous 24 months waiting time prior to the establishment of the Second Special Criminal Court which started hearing cases in May 2016.

I am advised that waiting time in the Central Criminal Court is being maintained at 11 months thanks to the continued assignment of a fifth Judge to the hearing of cases and that waiting times for criminal cases in the Circuit Criminal Courts vary across court venues in accordance with the level of court business in each circuit with an average waiting time of 6.5 months.

The Courts Service has also advised that delays in the hearing of cases can occur for a number of reasons, many of which are outside the control of the Courts and the Courts Service, for example, the unavailability of a witness or vital evidence, delays in the furnishing of reports or because the parties and/or legal practitioners are not ready to proceed on allocated dates. This gives rise to adjournments which can have an impact on the time taken to complete the hearing of a case and on the number of cases which can be disposed of in a court sitting.

The allocation of judicial resources is a matter for the Presidents of the Courts who continue to arrange additional sittings where possible within the resources available to reduce delays in the hearing of cases. The Courts Service continues to work with the Presidents of the Courts to bring about improvements in the waiting times across the court jurisdictions.

Crime Data

346. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of arrests, prosecutions and convictions for careless driving and or anti-social driving by each district in 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39774/17]

347. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of arrests, prosecutions and convictions for careless driving and or anti-social driving in and around Clonmel, County Tipperary in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39775/17]

348. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the way in which careless driving and or anti-social driving, including boy racer driving behaviour and events, are being policed across the country; his plans to improve policing of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39776/17]

349. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the way in which careless driving and or anti-social driving, including boy racer driving behaviour and events, are being monitored and halted across the country; his plans to improve this area of road safety; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39777/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 346 to 349, inclusive, together.

I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to the matters raised by the Deputy, and I will contact him directly when this information is to hand.

Leave to Remain

350. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will review the position of persons (details supplied) with particular reference to regularisation of their position in view of the fact they have resided here since 2005 and 2011 respectively and have established their life here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39781/17]

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 notifications pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the persons concerned have not submitted written representations.

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. 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

351. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the current and or expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39802/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person referred to by the Deputy entered the State on 21 July 2009 and registered on student conditions (Stamp 2) on 10 August 2009. This period of permission to reside in the State expired on 31 December 2013.

I am further informed by INIS that the person concerned sought further permission to reside under Stamp 2 conditions in 2015. This application was refused by INIS in 2016. INIS has no current application on hands in respect of permission to reside in the State by the person concerned.

In that regard, I would draw the Deputy's attention to Section 5 of the Immigration Act 2004, which provides that no non-national may be in the State other than in accordance with the permission of the Minister. A person who contravenes this requirement is for all purposes unlawfully present in the State.

A person found guilty of such a offence is liable under Section 13 of the Act of 2004 to a fine not exceeding €3,000 or to imprisonment for term not exceeding 12 months.

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.

Subsidiary Protection Applications

352. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for international protection under section 22 of the International Protection Act 2015 in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39817/17]

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

An application for consent to make a subsequent application for International Protection under Section 22 of the International Protection Act 2015 was received by the International Protection Office. An application for Subsidiary Protection has also been received which is awaiting processing. In the meantime the Deportation Order remains valid and in place.

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

Prison Service Staff

353. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a person (details supplied) will be paid in full the wages due to them; the support and advice which was provided to the person following an assault at work and a car accident while working; if he will resolve all matters relative to this case without delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39906/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Director General of the Irish Prison Service that Circulars 1/82 and 6/97 on sick leave arising from occupational injury or disease are the governing circulars in this matter.

The Irish Prison Service Proposal for Organisational Change deals with pay related matters concerning the payment of additional hours and allowances in respect of sick leave arising from occupational injury or disease.

The Chief Medical Officer's advice is sought on all applications to have an absence recorded under these circulars.

The process in place regarding occupational injuries and the pay involvement has been followed in the case of the person concerned.

There is support available for employees through the Employee Assistance Programme. The principal providers of the Employee Assistance Programme services are the Staff Support Officers at a local level. Their role is to support and advise staff with difficulties arising inside or outside the workplace which may have an impact on their ability to provide regular effective service. Inspire Workplaces are a confidential phone support service which is made available to all Irish Prison Service employees.

Official Engagements

354. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of events she attended in an official capacity for heritage week. [39138/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Heritage Week 2017, which was co-ordinated by the Heritage Council and funded by my Department, celebrated Ireland's built, natural and cultural heritage over nine days in August.

This year Heritage Week focused on Ireland's natural heritage. As Minister, I attend scores of engagements each year with those who are working to enrich the quality of life in Ireland through the protection and promotion of our rich heritage. I launched National Heritage Week in Dublin in July and also launched Monaghan Heritage week in Clones in August.

I was very pleased to see the success of Heritage Week this year. More than 450,000 people attended 2,299 heritage events all across the country, 500 events more than last year. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all of the volunteers and communities who took part.

National Parks

355. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the staffing levels of both full-time and part-time staff employed to maintain the castle gardens

at Glenveagh National Park, County Donegal; the number of vacancies in respect of full time, part time and seasonal positions which have yet to be filled as part of the gardening team; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39161/17]

356. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her Department has received formal requests for additional staffing resources to complement the team of workers employed to maintain and care for gardens at Glenveagh National Park, County Donegal, in each the of the years 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; if so, if the requests were either approved or rejected in each instance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39162/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 355 and 356 together.

I am advised that the staffing resources required to meet my Department's business needs are assessed through the Department's Workforce Plan, having regard to emerging business priorities, the availability of payroll resources and Department of Public Expenditure and Reform directives, guidelines and circulars on staffing. I am advised that while there have been no requests for additional permanent gardening staff in the location in question in the context of Workforce Planning in the years concerned, there has been a requirement for seasonal staff and I am advised that these posts have been approved and filled in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

I am also advised that there are four permanent and two seasonal members of staff employed specifically to maintain and care for the gardens at Glenveagh National Park. I am further advised that there are no outstanding full time, part time or seasonal posts to be filled in the gardening team. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that there has been significant recruitment in recent months across our National Parks including the appointment of an additional permanent bus driver and visitor guide at Glenveagh.

National Parks

357. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when the conservation plan for the care and preservation of architectural elements and ornamental structures sited at the castle gardens of Glenveagh National Park was formally enacted; her plans to revise and update the plan to ensure that the conservation needs of this amenity may be most effectively met in the years going forward; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39163/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In October 2015, the National Parks and Wildlife Service completed a "Statues and Ornamental Collection Conservation Training Report", for Glenveagh Castle. This report helps inform the process of business, budgetary and works planning for Glenveagh National Park in each financial year and this will continue in 2018.

The Training Report is an internal NPWS document rather than a statutory plan and therefore does not require enacting in a legislative process.

National Parks and Wildlife Service

358. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when a person (details supplied) in County Clare whose lands adjoin a National Parks and

Wildlife Service site will have their boundary wall completed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39164/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The area in question involves a stretch of lands which adjoins a Nature Reserve. I understand that at this location, the livestock on the adjoining lands frequently shelter under the trees growing in the nature reserve and the resultant pressing against the wall causes damage.

The National Parks and Wildlife service of my Department has carried out works in this regard over the past few years, including cutting back of trees growing along the boundary of these lands. The NPWS has also engaged a contractor to clear back the brush/hedges along the boundary. The joint wall itself has been repaired a number of times over the past three years, in some places by NPWS staff and in others by the owner of the other property. My Department is satisfied that the works undertaken mean that the wall is stock proof.

Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge

359. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den an Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta ós rud é go bhfuil an spriocdháta a gealladh i gceist pharlaiminte roimhe seo (Ceist 23977/17) sáraithe, cathain a fhoilseofar an plean gníomhaíochta maidir leis an Straitéis 20 Bliain don tréimhse 2017-2022. [39242/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I mí na Nollag 2015, mar chuid de Phlean Athnuachana na Státseirbhíse, eagraíodh Díospóireacht Oscailte ar Pholasáí faoin Straitéis 20-Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030. Rinneadh é sin ar mhaithe le breathnú siar ar an méid a bhí déanta go dtí sin maidir lena cur i bhfeidhm, chomh maith le breathnú chun cinn ar na tosaíochtaí ina leith don tréimhse cúig bliana amach romhainn.

Mar thoradh ar an díospóireacht oscailte sin, tá sé i gceist go mbeidh plean gníomhaíochta don tréimhse 2017-2022 á fhoilsiú ag mo Roinn. Ós rud é go bhfuil freagracht thras-Rannach i gceist maidir le cur i bhfeidhm na Straitéise, tá plé ar bun ag mo Roinn leis na páirtithe leasmhara éagsúla maidir le spriocanna sonracha agus tráthchlár ina leith a aontú.

Cé go n-aithnítear go bhfuil moill áirithe ar an sprioc ama a tugadh sa bhfreagra ar an gCeist Dála atá luaite ag an Teachta, leanfar ag obair i gcomhar leis na páirtithe leasmhara ábhartha i dtreo a bheith in ann an plean a fhoilsiú faoi dheireadh an fhómhair.

Oideachas Gaeltachta

360. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den an Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta cad atá ar intinn ag a Roinn a dhéanamh, mar chomhlacht ar a bhfuil freagracht faoi leith mar atá leagtha síos sa Pholasáí don Oideachas Gaeltachta, chun tacú le seirbhísí luathbhlianta a fheidhmíonn trí mheán na Gaeilge; cé na pleananna atá aici chun comhaltaí foirne agus acmhainní breise a chur ar fáil; cá mhéad comhalta foirne agus cá mhéad airgead breise a cuirfear ar fáil gach bliain sna cúig bliana atá romhainn; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [39243/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Dírím aird an Teachta ar an bhfreagra a thug mé ar Cheisteanna Dála Uimhir 306 & 307 den 4 Iúil 2017 faoin ábhar seo.

Mar a thug mé fios sa bhfreagra sin bunaíodh Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta Teo (CNNG)

in 2004 le tacaíocht ó Údarás na Gaeltachta le clár seirbhísí luathoideachais trí Ghaeilge a sholáthar sa Ghaeltacht. Cuireann CNNG seirbhís thacaíochta riaracháin agus oiliúna ar fáil do na seirbhísí luathoideachais a fheidhmíonn trí Ghaeilge sa Ghaeltacht - idir naíonraí, naíolanna, chlubanna bricfeasta, sheirbhísí iarscoile agus ghrúpaí máthar agus tachráin. Tá allúntas ar fiú €535,000 curtha ar fáil ag Údarás na Gaeltachta do CNNG in 2017 chun cabhrú le feidhmiú an chláir oibre sin.

Faoi láthair tá 74 seirbhís luathbhlianta (naíonra) ag feidhmiú faoi chúram CNNG ina gcuirtear seirbhís luathoideachais ar fáil do c.1,000 páiste ó cheann ceann na Gaeltachta.

Mar a bhaineann sé le cúrsaí oililúna san earnáil seo, is fiú a lua go bhfuil tacaíochtaí eile á gcur ar fáil le cur le cumas, caighdeán agus cáilíocht na gcleachtóirí sna seirbhísí luathbhlianta sa Ghaeltacht. Tá cúrsa oiliúna ag leibhéal FETAC leibhéal 6 á sholáthar i gceantar Gaeltachta na Gaillimhe faoi láthair agus 16 rannpháirtí ag freastal ar an gcúrsa atá á sholáthar ag Muin-tearas, fochuideachta de chuid Údarás na Gaeltachta. Tuigtear dom go bhfuil na féidearthachtaí á bhfiosrú ag an Údarás faoi láthair maidir leis an gcúrsa céanna a sholáthar i ceantair Ghaeltachta Chiarraí agus Dhún na nGall, má tá éileamh ann ina leith.

Luafainn sa chomhthéacs sin chomh maith scéim nua, An Scéim Forbartha um Oiliúint Luathbhlianta sa Ghaeltacht a d'fhógair an tÚdarás le gairid. Tá an scéim seo dírithe ar oiliúint bhreise a chur ar dhaoine atá ag obair i seirbhísí luathbhlianta agus cáilíocht bhreise a bhaint amach. Tá sé mar aidhm ag an scéim tacú le daoine atá ag obair sa réimse luathbhlianta trí Ghaeilge sa Ghaeltacht agus atá ag iarraidh céim nó ardcháilíocht tríú leibhéal a bhaint amach sa réimse sin.

I dteannta leis na tacaíochtaí thuasluaite, ní miste dom a rá go gcuireann mo Roinn féin cúnaimh ar fáil chomh maith chun tacú leis an earnáil, trí Scéim Seirbhísí Réamhscoile. Faoin scéim sin cuirtear cúnaimh ar fáil fáil d'ionaid tacaíochta teaghlaigh agus d'ionaid chúraim leanaí áirithe atá lonnaithe sa Ghaeltacht (a mbíonn naíolann ag feidhmiú iontu) chun gníomhaíochtaí breise sealbhaithe agus saibhrithe teanga a chur ar fáil do lucht úsáidte na seirbhísí. Ina theannta sin cuirtear pacáiste tacaíochta teanga ar fáil do theaghlaigh óga na Gaeltachta atá ag togáil clainne le Gaeilge nó a dteastaíonn uathu é sin a dhéanamh agus tá ráchairt shuntasach ar an mbeart praiticiúil seo.

Sa Pholasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta 2017-2022 a d'fhoilsigh an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna i mí Dheireadh Fómhair 2016 leagtar amach roinnt bearta ann a bhaineann leis an earnáil réamhscolaíochta sa Ghaeltacht - a bhfuil baint ag páirtithe leasmhara éagsúla lena gcur i bhfeidhm, lena n-áirítear mo Roinn féin, An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna agus An Roinn Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige.

Beidh gá dá réir do gach páirtí leasmhar, cúram a dhéanamh d'fheidhmiú an pholasaí seo ar bhonn comhpháirtíochta agus tá obair idir lámha chun na críche sin cheana féin. Is é an cuspóir atá ag an bpolasaí - ach an oiread leis an bpróiseas pleanála teanga agus an tacaíocht phraiticiúil leanúnach atá á cur ar fáil ón státchiste don earnáil réamhscolaíochta Ghaeilge sa Ghaeltacht trí chéile ná a chinntiú go ndéantar an Ghaeilge a threisiú mar theanga pobail agus teaghlaigh sa Ghaeltacht - i gcomhréir le mianta chomhphobail na Gaeltachta iad féin agus lena bhfuil ag croílár na straitéise 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge.

Turf Cutting Compensation Scheme Applications

361. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when a person (details supplied) who has provided all the requested documents to her Depart-

ment will receive payment for the NPWS scheme and cessation of turf cutting; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39250/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): An application for compensation under the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme has been received by my Department from the individual referred to in the Deputy's Question.

The qualifying criteria for the cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme are that:

- The applicant must have had a legal interest (ownership or a turbary right) in one of the 36 raised bog natural heritage areas on 25 May 2010 and must have had the right to cut and remove turf from the property on that date;

- The applicant must have been cutting turf on the land in question during the five year period up to 14 January 2014;

- The turf resource on the site has not been exhausted; and

- No turf cutting or associated activity is ongoing on the property.

An assessment of the bog plot in question to confirm whether turf was cut on the site during the relevant five year period is scheduled to be carried out by my Department. Once this assessment has been completed, my Department will be in a position to examine the application further.

Foras na Gaeilge

362. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if all staff members of Foras na Gaeilge take the 10% cut as did other public servants; and if they were treated in the same manner under FEMPI legislation. [39256/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Foras na Gaeilge has confirmed that the full provisions of the FEMPI legislation, including the 10% salary reduction for new employees post 1 January 2011, have been applied in the case of all southern based staff.

Hare Coursing Regulation

363. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she is considering changes to the conditions or criteria for the application and granting of licences for the purpose of hare coursing. [39272/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department issued licences under the Wildlife Acts to the Irish Coursing Club, covering their affiliated coursing clubs, to capture and tag hares for use at regulated hare coursing meetings for the 2017/18 coursing season which extends from the end of September 2017 to the end of February 2018. I have made changes to this year's licence to include a condition formally requiring that an obligatory return must be made to my Department giving particulars of the number of hares coursed each day and other data relating to any hare deaths and hares needing assistance or injured.

Export Controls

364. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of export licences for cultural objects that have been granted over the past five years; and the items involved in each case. [39278/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): There have been a total of 121 export licences issued by my Department since 2013 under Section 50 of the National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997 and EU Regulation 116-2009 (and subsequent amendments), as appropriate. Details of these are available on my Department's website at <https://www.chg.gov.ie/arts/culture/projects-and-programmes/export-of-cultural-goods/>.

In addition, the National Museum of Ireland (NMI) issues export licences primarily for samples of archaeological material for the purpose of research, post excavation analysis, dating and other scientific processes to be carried out outside the jurisdiction by specialists in research laboratories, often attached to universities. Where samples are required for any form of destructive analysis, licences to alter under the terms of the National Monuments Acts 1930 to 2014 would also be sought and issued in tandem with the export licences. 505 such licences have been issued by the NMI since 2013 to present.

Finally, a total of 373 export licences were issued by the National Gallery of Ireland (NGI) since 2013 under Section 51 of the National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997. Details of these licences are also available on my Department's website at <https://www.chg.gov.ie/arts/culture/projects-and-programmes/export-of-cultural-goods/>.

National Monuments

365. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she has received correspondence from a group (details supplied); the assistance which can be afforded to this group; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39371/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department has not received correspondence to date from this group in relation to commemorating the event referred to by the Deputy.

The structure in question is a National Monument in my ownership as Minister and is managed on my behalf by the Commissioners of Public Works. I understand that the group referred to was in contact with the Commissioners earlier this year in relation to hosting a commemorative event at this site and were advised on how to proceed. The group will need prior approval from the Commissioners for the use of the National Monument. Any proposed impacts or works on the National Monument will also require my consent under Section 14 of the National Monuments Acts 1930-2014.

The best advice for the group is, in the first instance, to remain in contact with the Office of Public Works in relation to obtaining the necessary permissions. I also suggest contacting the Heritage Officer in the local authority who is well placed to advise on the issues including the various funding options which may be available or applicable in this case.

The Heritage Council, which my Department funds, provides some grants for community events relating to heritage. It is a matter for the Heritage Council to decide how its funding should be allocated across the range of research, education and conservation programmes it supports annually having regard to competing priorities for limited resources. Further details

of grant schemes available from the Heritage Council can be found at www.heritagecouncil.ie.

Wildlife Conservation

366. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the National Parks and Wildlife Service is using Larsen traps as part of its curlew conservation programme; and if it is using these traps in other programmes. [39426/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): A number of native Irish breeding birds, particularly ground-nesting birds, are of priority conservation concern due to steep declines in their breeding population. This includes the Curlew, which has declined by 97% in Ireland since the late 1980s and needs substantial effort if it is to be saved from extinction as a breeding species here.

One of the main reason for the declines of Curlew and other ground-nesting birds is excessive predation rates, including by members of the crow family, in particular Grey Crows and Magpies. It is estimated that there are more than half a million of both species in Ireland, and that their population is artificially high.

Magpies and Grey Crows are legally and humanely controlled, in a targeted and localised way, by professional operatives on contract to the National Parks and Wildlife Service, to help rare and threatened species rear their young. Larsen traps are used as part of this effort for Curlew, Red-throated Diver, Red Grouse, Lapwing, Redshank, Snipe, Corncrake and other species where predation is judged to be a significant factor in their decline.

The use of Larsen traps complies with the provisions of the Wildlife Act 1976 (Approved Traps, Snares and Nets) Regulations 2003 (SI No. 620/2003).

National Landscape Strategy

367. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of the national landscape strategy for Ireland with regard to the hiring of landscape architects by local authorities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39492/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Arising from Ireland's ratification of the European Landscape Convention, I launched the National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2015-2025 in May 2015. Copies are available on my Department's website.

The Strategy is being implemented in two phases. The key action in Phase one, as set out in the Implementation Programme, is the preparation of a National Landscape Character Assessment (NLCA). My Department is currently preparing tender documentation for the NLCA. The NLCA will be an important tool to provide data and objective information required to evaluate the current state of the landscape and to underpin effective spatial planning and landscape-centred decision making.

I would note that the primary role of planning authorities and the consultative roles of other bodies and persons in decision-making relating to landscape issues will continue to be governed by the provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). One of the objectives of the National Landscape Strategy will be to assist in the achievement of greater consistency in decision making when dealing with issues of landscape via the landscape charac-

ter assessment process, within City and County Development Plans, at local government level.

The second phase of the strategy under Action 3, following completion of the National Landscape Character Assessment, is the preparation of statutory guidelines on local Landscape Character Assessments for Planning Authorities. The preparation and issuing of these statutory guidelines will be a joint action of my Department and that of my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

There is no requirement in the National Landscape Strategy for local authorities to hire landscape architects. Its staffing requirement is a matter for each local authority in accordance with its own requirements and resources.

Scéim na mBóithre Pobail

368. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den an Aire Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta an bhfuil iarratas faighte ag a Roinn ó Chomhairle Contae na Gaillimhe maidir le hairgead a chur ar fáil d'uasghrádu bóthair (sonraí tugtha); cén rannóg atá ag plé leis an iarratas sa Roinn; cén dul chun cinn atá déanta go dtí seo maidir leis an iarratas a bhreithniú; cén uair a dhéanfar cinneadh ar an iarratas; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [39847/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Ní miste a shoiléiriú ar an gcéad dul síos nach bhfuil aon iarratas ar mhaoiniú na Roinne faighte ó Chomhairle Contae na Gaillimhe maidir leis an mbóthar a bhfuil tagairt déanta dó sa cheist atá curtha ag an Teachta. Mar is eol don Teachta, bhíodh ciste airgid ag mo Roinn faoina ndéantaí oibreacha feabhsúcháin ar bhóithre áirithe Gaeltachta i gcomhar leis na hÚdaráis Áitiúla ábhartha. Mar gheall ar thosca airgeadais tá an ciste agus an scéim faoinar ceadaíodh oibreacha den chineál seo ar fionraí anois.

Tuigim, áfach, go bhfuil mo chomhleacaí, an tAire Gnóthaí Tuaithe agus Pobal ag breathnú ar na féidireachtaí chun scéim bóithre áise a chur i bhfeidhm i 2017.

Constitutional Amendments

369. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the reason for recent comments on the forthcoming referendum on the eighth amendment being held in June 2018. [39100/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy will be aware, the Government established a Citizens' Assembly, in line with its Programme for Partnership Government commitment, to consider a number of matters including constitutional reform. The Assembly first considered the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution (Article 40.3.3), and submitted its final report, setting out its recommendations, to the Oireachtas on 29 June 2017.

The Special Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution is now considering the report of the Citizens' Assembly in order to recommend to the Oireachtas the policy direction it should consider on the issue.

Both the Taoiseach and I have previously stated that we envisage a referendum on this issue in 2018.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

370. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the reason Ocuville Lutein is no longer available under the general medical services scheme; if he will reinstate Octuvite Lutein on the medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39727/17]

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

Health Services Staff Remuneration

371. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a person working for a section 39 organisation, such as an organisation (details supplied), is not entitled to the same pay restorations as their public sector or HSE colleagues as provided for under the Haddington Road and Lansdowne Road agreements or entitled to future public sector pay increases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39837/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under section 39 of the Health Act 2004, the HSE has in place Service Level Agreements with voluntary providers which set out the level of service to be provided for the grant to the individual organisation. Any individuals employed by these section 39 organisations are not HSE employees, therefore neither the HSE nor the Minister have a role in determining the salaries or other terms and conditions applying to these staff.

The staff of these Section 39 organisations are not public servants and therefore were not subject to the FEMPI legislation which imposed pay reductions. It follows then that the staff of the section 39 bodies will not be eligible for any pay restoration which is provided for under the more recent Public Service Agreements. 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.

Primary Care Centres

372. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on allowing primary care resource centres to become ambulatory care hubs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39055/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Programme for Partnership Government confirmed the Government's commitment to a decisive shift towards primary care. In this context, in my role as Minister of Health, I am bringing a renewed focus to the development of primary care and my Department's Statement of Strategy 2016-2019 sets out a range of actions aimed at improving health outcomes and the health services over the next the period of the strategy. Amongst the key areas to be addressed in this context are:

- Further development of multidisciplinary primary care teamworking;
- Planning and resourcing the primary care workforce;
- Promoting the provision of necessary infrastructural capacity;
- Development of chronic disease management in primary care; and

- Negotiation of a modernised GP contract.

As the Deputy will be aware significant funding has been invested in the development of Primary Care Centres in recent years; 104 Primary Care Centres are now operational. In addition to the 5 already opened in 2017, a further 10 are expected to open in 2017, and another 13 are expected to open in 2018 with many more either under construction or at advanced or early planning stage.

The development of Primary Care Centres to accommodate Primary Care Teams and, where possible, GPs in the one location is a key enabler for the delivery of primary care services. Primary Care Centres facilitate the shift from acute care towards primary care because of the range of multi-disciplinary services they can provide and the role they can play in keeping people who don't need to be in an acute setting out of hospital.

It is the Government's intention to continue to invest in and expand capacity in the primary care sector, including the remit of services delivered in Primary Care Centres, so that we can keep people well and minimise, as far as possible, the number of patients admitted to hospitals. This requires a focus on health promotion, prevention, early identification and simple and early interventions rather than dealing with episodes as they occur. Primary Care Centres can and are enabling such a focus to be delivered through a range of measures including:

- Multi-disciplinary Primary Care Teams being located in Primary Care Centres providing a range of services such as General Practitioner Service, Practice Nurse Service, Community Nurse Service, Home Help/Home Care Attendant Service, Occupational Therapy Service, Physiotherapy Service, Speech and Language Therapy Service and Social Work Service;

- Provision of diagnostic facilities in Primary Care Centres;

- Utilisation of space within Primary Care Centres for health promotion/prevention activities.

Officials in my Department continue to review and examine the role of Primary Care Centres to ensure that we are harnessing and maximising the potential of Primary Care Centres to meet patients' health needs in local communities and reduce the need for attendance at hospital.

General Practitioner Services Provision

373. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his plans to keep older and newly qualified general practitioners here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39056/17]

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 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.

Efforts undertaken in recent years to increase the number of practicing GPs include changes to the entry provisions to the GMS scheme to accommodate more flexible/shared GMS/GP contracts, and to the retirement provisions for GPs under the GMS scheme, allowing GPs to hold GMS contracts until their 72nd birthday, as well as the introduction of enhanced supports for rural GP practices. These steps should help to address the future demand for GPs by enticing GPs who may have ceased practising for family or other reasons back into the workforce, facilitating

GPs to work past the standard retirement age and encouraging more GPs to work in rural areas.

Separately, the State is seeking to train more GPs to provide GP services to the population. In 2009, there were 120 GP training places and in 2017 there were 170 training places filled. The Government is committed to further increasing this number in future years.

In addition, 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, and health service management have already progressed a number of significant measures through engagement with GP representatives in recent years. 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.

The next phase of engagement on a new GP contract is under way. I am keen to ensure that future contractual terms for GPs would enjoy the support of the broad community of GPs and in this regard officials from my Department and the HSE are engaging with the relevant GP representative bodies in relation to the wide range of matters which will need to be encompassed by the contract development process. The GP contracts review process will, among other things, seek to introduce further measures aimed at making general practice a fulfilling and rewarding career option into the future.

General Medical Services Scheme

374. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his plans for a new GMS contract that will represent a new opportunity and reimagine the way in which general practice and primary care is delivered here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39057/17]

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.

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, the engagement may take

some time. While I am of course anxious to see good progress made, it is not my intention to set a deadline for completion of discussions. I look forward to significant progress being made in the months ahead. 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.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

375. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite the provision of essential equipment for a person (details supplied). [39061/17]

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

376. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the status of HSE dental services in Ballymahon, County Longford; and if he plans to intervene in order to protect this service. [39087/17]

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.

Home Care Packages Provision

377. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite extra home care hours for a person (details supplied) in order that they can be discharged from Cherry Orchard Hospital. [39088/17]

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 Aids and Appliances Provision

378. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite a wheelchair for a person (details supplied). [39089/17]

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.

Organ Donation

379. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce a soft opt-out model of organ donation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39113/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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.

Assisted Human Reproduction

380. **Deputy Seán Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if he will give consideration to funding an IVF scheme for couples who both carry the cystic fibrosis gene which would remove the CF gene before conception (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39114/17]

391. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a campaign by an organisation (details supplied) for an IVF scheme for couples with cystic fibrosis gene; his plans to provide supports for those persons undergoing IVF and associated treatments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39171/17]

443. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if consideration has been given or will be given to the funding of an IVF scheme to eliminate the cystic fibrosis gene for couples affected by this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39451/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 380, 391 and 443 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.

An analysis of the HRB evidence review will feed into the development of 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 the AHR legislation and the development of policy on public funding for AHR treatment to be a priority for 2017.

HSE Staff Data

381. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the number of senior executive positions that have been filled annually by the HSE since 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39123/17]

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

Voluntary Sector Remuneration

382. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the concerns of agencies funded under section 39 of the Health Act 2004 concerning pay restoration; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that agencies which were required to align their staff pay to HSE salary scales over many years and were instructed to reduce pay in accordance with FEMPI have now been informed that their staff are not entitled to any pay restoration as FEMPI is unwound in the public service; if this reflects his own position on the matter; if so, the way in which he justifies it; the number of agencies, the number of staff and the amount of pay involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39135/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under section 39 of the Health Act 2004, the HSE has in place Service Level Agreements with voluntary providers which set out the level of service to be provided for the grant to the individual organisation. Any individuals employed by these section 39 organisations are not HSE employees, therefore neither the HSE nor the Minister have a role in determining the salaries or other terms and conditions applying to these staff.

The staff of these Section 39 organisations are not public servants and therefore were not subject to the FEMPI legislation which imposed pay reductions. It follows then that the staff of the section 39 bodies will not be eligible for any pay restoration which is provided for under the more recent Public Service Agreements. 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.

Your query in relation to the number of section 39 agencies involved has been referred to the HSE for direct reply. For the reasons outlined above, information in relation to the number of staff and the amount of pay involved is not available.

Health Services Data

383. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who availed of services at a HSE day care facility (details supplied) over the past 12 months; the locations of the surrounding district from which patients attended; and the details of the various services provided at this centre. [39146/17]

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

384. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health the reason none of the services has been relocated to the new and under-occupied HSE primary care centre building on the Navan Road in Kells, County Meath, further to the end of services at a HSE day care centre (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39147/17]

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.

Dental Services Staff

385. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health his plans to recruit dental hygienists in CHO1 to address significant waiting times and staff shortages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39151/17]

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

386. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has not received a primary school dental appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39154/17]

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 Medical Services Scheme

387. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health if a medical condition (details supplied) is covered under the GMS scheme. [39157/17]

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

388. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect an appointment for an MRI scan in the Midland Regional Hospital, Tullamore,

County Offaly. [39165/17]

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.

Dental Services Data

389. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the number of children and adolescents waiting for an appointment for urgent orthodontic treatment in CHO1; the efforts being taken to reduce the waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39168/17]

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 Data

390. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the number of children and adolescents waiting for zero to three months, three to six months, six to nine months, nine to 12 months, 12 to 18 months, 18 to 24 months and over 24 months for orthodontic treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39169/17]

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

Question No. 391 answered with Question No. 380.

Dental Services

392. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health his plans to develop and implement a new oral health strategy as recommended by an organisation (details supplied); his views on whether a new national dental health and oral hygiene programme is needed in schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39172/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Oral Health Policy, which the Department of Health is currently developing, includes a comprehensive needs assessment. It is due to be completed later this year and will inform future provision of oral health services.

Ambulance Service

393. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health when discussions on the provision of first responder schemes between the National Ambulance Service and the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management are expected to conclude; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39174/17]

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

Disability Support Services Provision

394. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be transferred to the rehabilitation centre in Dún Laoghaire, County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39177/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question relate to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Disabilities Assessments

395. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be given an appointment for an assessment of need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39179/17]

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.

Nursing Home Fees

396. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on his Department's regulations with regard to the cost of so-called extras being levied on residents of nursing homes and their families. [39183/17]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

397. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) can be given a date to have open heart surgery performed in St James's Hospital. [39186/17]

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

398. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will schedule an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39197/17]

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.

Alcohol Consumption Data

399. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a breakdown of alcohol consumption statistics to differentiate between the total alcohol consumption per capita greater than 15 years of age of the population and the total alcohol per capita greater than 15 years of age consumption in litres of pure alcohol of tourists visiting here in each of the years 2014 to 2016 respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39211/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The Health Research Board (HRB) is the lead agency in Ireland responsible for supporting and funding health research, information and evidence.

The HRB has informed the Department that they do not collate data on alcohol consumed by tourists visiting Ireland. The table below sets out national alcohol consumption figures for those aged 15 and over, as requested by the Deputy.

Year	Ireland's Adult (15+) Per Capita Alcohol Consumption Litres of pure alcohol
2014	11.00
2015	10.93
2016	11.46

Services for People with Disabilities

400. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of funding for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39233/17]

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.

Patient Transport Expenditure

401. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if he will investigate the transport charges which have been incurred by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39236/17]

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

402. **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. [39268/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Dental Services Provision

403. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will review the case of a person (details supplied); the way this person was missed on the primary school dental scheme; if they can now be urgently seen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39271/17]

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

404. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if an assessment appointment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork can be expedited. [39284/17]

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

Dental Services Provision

405. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if dental services will continue to be delivered at a centre (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39287/17]

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 Home Accommodation Provision

406. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health if his Department will facilitate a transfer of a person (details supplied) to a nursing home closer to their family in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39291/17]

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.

Vaccination Programme

407. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the amount the relaunched HPV awareness campaign is costing; if a public relations company has been contracted to boost this campaign; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39311/17]

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.

Counselling Services Provision

408. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will reconsider removing funding from a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39313/17]

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 Expenditure

409. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if a public relations company is involved in the new HPV awareness campaign; if so, the cost of this contract; the duration of the contract; if there was a tender process; the number of companies that applied for the contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39314/17]

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.

Patient Transport Provision

410. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if funding can be provided for a person (details supplied) with special needs for a taxi to transport them to and from a training centre. [39321/17]

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 provision of transport to adults with a disability attending HSE-funded day services is not a core health service, and the HSE endeavours to ensure that all service users access public transport, including rural transport services, if possible. This is in keeping with the principle of mainstreaming with a clear focus on ensuring persons with a disability have access to the normal range of services and participate in community life as far as possible. In general, day service users are in receipt of disability allowance and are automatically entitled to the Free Travel Pass, so there should be no additional cost burden at an individual level.

However when all other options are exhausted, and a person cannot avail of a day service because they do not have transport to attend, some transport is provided by disability service providers on a case by case basis as resources allow. Service providers are continuously reviewing their transport arrangements to ensure that they are used as effectively and equitably as possible within available resources. This may result in the provision of a reduced quantum of service to the service user, and the HSE does its best to provide transport in certain cases without reducing services. Service providers continue to keep the matter of transport under review.

The HSE has committed to establishing a high level cross divisional working group this year to rationalise the provision of transport and to maximise equitable access and efficiencies. The HSE also intends to liaise with the National Transport Authority and disability service providers to explore ways in which the Authority's services could assist people with disabilities. The National Transport Authority has a total of 17 Transport co-ordinating units called Local Link which provide safe secure and reliable Public Transport services in local and rural areas of Ireland through a combination of scheduled Public Transport services and door to door services. The HSE plans to explore the opportunities these units may provide to people with disabilities to access day services and participate in the social, educational and economic life of their local communities.

As the remainder of the Deputy's 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.

Treatment Abroad Scheme

411. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if he will approve treatment abroad for a person (details supplied); and if the original approach to the HSE will be approved. [39326/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its be-

half, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The HSE has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Care Services Provision

412. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if he will put in place a follow-up care plan for a person (details supplied); and if the HSE will be instructed to engage immediately with this person and their family. [39327/17]

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.

Vaccination Programme

413. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on the recent comments of a person (details supplied) in which they referred to some of the HPV vaccine campaigns as acts of emotional terrorism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39333/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer in women worldwide and is linked to high risk Human Papilloma virus (HPV) types. In 2009 the National Immunisation Advisory Committee 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, the spread of inaccurate information concerning the safety and effectiveness of vaccines in the media means, that for many the perceived risks of vaccines appear to outweigh the risks of diseases. The claims concerning the HPV vaccine has led to a significant drop in uptake rates from 87% in 2014/15 to 72% in 2015/16 and provisional figures indicate that the uptake rates in 2016/17 fell further to 50%.

This significant drop in uptake rates of the HPV vaccine will have significant consequences for some of the girls who do not receive the vaccine. The Irish Cancer Society estimates that the recent drop in the rate of uptake to 50% will have the following consequences:

- 1000 girls will require invasive therapy to prevent the pre-cancerous form of HPV;
- A further 100 girls will develop cervical cancer and will require life altering treatment; and
- The death of at least 40 girls with cervical cancer who did not receive the HPV vaccine.

It is important that parents receive accurate and credible information to enable them to take a fully informed decision concerning HPV vaccination.

The HSE recently launched their information campaign for HPV vaccination as part of the

2017/18 Schools Immunisation Programme. This launch is part of an extensive media campaign coinciding with the start of the programme in September 2017. The focus remains on providing accurate information in relation to the safety of the HPV vaccine, and to increase the uptake rate in girls as part of the schools immunisation programme. It includes a comprehensive range of materials for parents, schools and medical practitioners.

I fully support the information campaign and its aim to increase uptake of this important vaccine.

National Dementia Strategy Implementation

414. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health the plans, additional funding and resources that are being put in place nationally by his Department and the HSE to better care for the estimated 3,500 persons who will develop Alzheimer's disease each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39336/17]

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 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.

A National Dementia Office has been established in the HSE to drive implementation of the Strategy across health and social care services. The Department of Health chairs a National Dementia Strategy Monitoring Group to monitor and advise on Strategy implementation.

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 funding needed 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 asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy on the plans and resources aspect of the Parliamentary Question as soon as possible.

Vaccination Programme

415. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the reason the HSE has not circulated the package information leaflet in the HPV vaccine information packs in order that parents may make an informed consent on the vaccine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39339/17]

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 90 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.

The HSE is committed to providing accurate information for parents about diseases, the vaccines to prevent them and side effects to allow them to choose whether to give consent to vaccination. All the information provided to parents about vaccination is prepared from the available licensed documentation for each vaccine, the Summary of Products Characteristics (SPC) and Patient Information Leaflet (PIL). The information is presented in clear simple language and approved by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) so that it can be understood by all adults. The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) Guide ‘Communicating in plain English’ (2015) developed in partnership with NALA states that “One in six people find reading and understanding everyday texts difficult: for example, reading a health leaflet, bus timetable or medicine instructions”. Therefore, like other countries providing school immunisation programmes, the Patient Information Leaflet (PIL) is replaced by this information leaflet and like other countries the HSE information leaflet provides the same information on side effects of the vaccine.

Prior to all school immunisations, parents receive an information pack in a sealed package with an information leaflet, consent form and cover letter. The information packs for all immunisations are standardised nationally. The information booklets include information on all the known side effects that can occur after each vaccination. All the known side effects of the HPV vaccine Gardasil are outlined in the information booklet given to parents. Parents are also given contact details for their local immunisation office and advised to speak to a member of the school immunisation team if they have any further questions.

Parents are not being denied the information on the Patient Information Leaflet. The HSE parent information leaflet refers parents to the website www.hpv.ie where links to additional information including the licensing documentation, the SPC and the PIL for each vaccine can be found.

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. The diverse nature of these symptoms, which can have both physical and psychological causes, are shared by many conditions which has implications for both diagnostic and treatment services. The individual nature of the needs of some children may require access to specialist services and the HSE are currently working to put in place clinical care pathways appropriate to the differing medical needs of this group. As there is no scientific evidence that the vaccine causes long term illnesses, the HPV vaccine cannot be held responsible for these illnesses.

It is important that people receive accurate information from reliable sources in relation to the safety of vaccines, and to increase the uptake rates of all vaccines in the State’s immunisation programmes. The HSE recently launched their information campaign for HPV vaccination as part of the 2017/18 Schools Immunisation Programme. This launch is part of an extensive media campaign coinciding with the start of the programme in September 2017. The focus remains on providing accurate information in relation to the safety of the HPV vaccine, and to increase the uptake rate in girls as part of the schools immunisation programme. It includes a comprehensive range of materials for parents, schools and medical practitioners.

I fully support the information campaign and its aim to increase uptake of this important vaccine.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

416. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is a shortage of ICU beds in Crumlin hospital particularly in view of the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39340/17]

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

In relation to the queries raised, as they are service matters, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

417. **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. [39344/17]

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 Remuneration

418. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the case of a person (details supplied) who was not paid their salary at the end of August 2017 as scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39345/17]

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.

Home Help Service Provision

419. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the status of the position of a person (details supplied) on a waiting list for additional home support and respite; and if he

will make a statement on the matter. [39358/17]

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, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Disability Services Provision

420. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if steps can be taken to appoint a social worker to liaise with the parents of a person (details supplied) to ensure their needs are met; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39359/17]

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. Under the reconfiguration of children's disability services, it is recommended that social workers will be 'core' members of the Children's Disability Network Teams. However, not every child with a disability would need the services of a social worker. In disability services, key workers/case managers are often assigned to individual service users to provide information and support to both the service user and their carer/family. The key worker/case manager would be part of a multi-disciplinary team and would work with the service user and other HSE/Voluntary agencies to facilitate a person-centred and a family-centred approach to the service user's needs.

However, as the Deputy's question relates to service matters and an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Departmental Offices

421. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when his Department will move to its new headquarters (details supplied). [39364/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Depending on the completion of the ongoing fit-out of the building, it is anticipated that the staff of my Department will move to the accommodation in Miesian Plaza during the first quarter of 2018.

Departmental Offices

422. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when his Department started

paying rent on its new headquarters (details supplied). [39365/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have no role in relation to the rent or lease arrangements in respect of the buildings concerned. This is a matter for the Office of Public Works.

Disease Management

423. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the testing of Lyme's disease; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39369/17]

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.

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 localised 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.

Medical Card Applications Data

424. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 1199 of 11 September 2017, the number of new medical card applications awaiting processing by CHO area or county; and the number of these applications that have exceeded the 15 day turnaround by CHO area or county. [39376/17]

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

425. **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. [39377/17]

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

426. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will arrange for the public health nurse to call to a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [39397/17]

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

Hospital Services

427. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health when funding will be provided to fund the 96 extra bed unit at university hospital Limerick; and the steps he is taking to alleviate the high level of overcrowding in the hospital. [39398/17]

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

Health Services Provision

428. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of pain management clinics in the Border, midlands and western regions by county and specific location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39406/17]

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.

Health Services Provision

429. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of HSE pain management clinics that have been closed since 2011; the locations of the closed clinics; the reason for their closure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39407/17]

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.

Health Services Provision

430. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting a first appointment to a pain management clinic, by county and specific location, in the Border, midlands and western regions as at 31 December 2015 and as at 31 August 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39408/17]

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

431. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the status of the planning process for the delivery of the stroke unit in Bantry hospital; the stage it is at; if the value as reported of €4 million is accurate; the date on which work will commence; the timeframe for the project to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39416/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly

Maternity Services Provision

432. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the waiting list for gynaecological procedures both day and inpatient cases since April 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39417/17]

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

Home Care Packages

433. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to give families the choice and supports needed on a statutory basis to allow them keep older relatives at home instead of the fair deal scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39418/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Department of Health is currently engaged in a detailed process to develop plans for a new statutory scheme and system of regulation for home care services.

The statutory scheme for home care will introduce clear rules in relation to what services individuals are eligible for and how decisions are made on allocating services. For that reason, developing a new statutory scheme will be an important step in ensuring that the system operates in a consistent and fair manner for all those who need home care services. It will also help to improve access to the home care services that people need, in an affordable and sustainable way. The system of regulation for home care will help to ensure that the public can be confident that the services provided are of a high standard.

I along with Minister Harris launched a public consultation on these matters 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. The Department wants 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. I encourage all those with an interest in home care services to make a submission to the consultation which closes on 2 October.

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.

The development of a regulatory and funding model for home care services is a complex undertaking. While the public consultation is an important step in the process of developing the new scheme, a significant amount of additional preparation remains to be carried out before final decisions are taken on the form of home care scheme and system of regulation. This is required if the reforms are to be successful, affordable and sustainable. Every effort will be made to progress this matter as quickly as possible.

Hospital Services

434. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase capacity in acute hospitals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39419/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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. 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.

Mental Health Services Staff

435. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the filling of vacancies in mental health services; the steps that have been taken in 2017 to address this matter in the north and south Lee areas in Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[39420/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Hospital Procedures

436. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health his views on the reported 54% reduction in the number of elective surgeries in the past four years and in particular the cancellation of 41,000 elective surgeries in 2016; the actions that are being taken to address the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39421/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Over recent years activity in acute hospitals has increased, with the total number of discharges of inpatients and daycases rising around 34% between 2006 and 2015. Last year alone there was a 4% increase in inpatient and daycase activity over 2015, and in 2016 1.69 million patients received inpatient or daycase treatment in our hospitals, an increase of almost 40,000 on the previous year.

It is important to recognise that, in order to improve efficiency in our hospital system, over the last number of years there has been a greater emphasis on increasing the number of procedures, previously carried out as inpatient procedures, which are now carried out on a daycase basis. Consequently, when comparing hospital elective activity for 2012 with 2016, it can be seen that, while inpatient elective discharges decreased, daycase discharges have increased.

In fact, taken together, elective inpatient discharges and daycase discharges increased from 1.02m in 2012 to 1.15m in 2016. HSE data for 2016 show that while elective inpatient discharges had reduced by 3.5% in comparison with the same period in 2015, daycase discharges increased by 3.1%. It is important to remember that this is the context of ever-growing demand with increased attendances at EDs, including by older persons.

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.

Based on data provided by the NTPF, collated from reports by hospitals, approximately 3,400 elective procedures, on average, are cancelled per month. In 2016, typically in a month, there were approximately 53,000 admissions to acute hospitals on a daycase and an inpatient basis.

It is essential that hospitals continue to improve how they manage, and balance, the demand for emergency care with the planning of elective procedures, to minimise the impact on patients. In addition, it is important that the HSE continues to improve its processes to minimise the number sessions lost when patients cancel or do not attend for their procedures.

The Department of Health has commenced a Health Service Capacity review in line with the Programme for Government commitment, the findings of which are due to be published before the end of the year.

Ministerial Meetings

437. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to meet the head of a programme (details supplied) in the UK when they visit Dublin in October 2017 to deliver an address on e-cigarettes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39422/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I have not had a formal meeting request to meet with the head of a programme in the UK on this occasion.

Electronic Cigarettes

438. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce legislation to on the use of e-cigarettes inside public venues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39423/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I have no plans to introduce legislation prohibiting the use of e-cigarettes in public places.

The introduction of workplace smoking ban was based on clear and unequivocal evidence that second hand smoke is harmful to non-smokers. That evidence base does not exist for the aerosol generated from e-cigarettes. However, individual organisations/companies are free to introduce an e-cigarette free policy if they so choose.

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.

Tobacco Control Measures

439. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the latest statistics on the number of persons smoking; if he is satisfied with the reduction; the extra effort that will be made to make the State smoke free; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39424/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The 2016 Healthy Ireland survey indicates that 23% of the population aged 15 years and older are current smokers i.e. 19% smoke daily and 4% smoke occasionally. This compares with 2007 SLÁN data which indicated that 29% of Irish adults were smokers. Data from the 2017 Health Ireland Survey will be published in the near future.

In relation to children, rates of smoking are relatively low across all age groups in Ireland when compared to other European and North American countries. The 2014 Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children survey indicates that 8% of children aged from 10 to 17 years currently smoke. In 2006 this percentage was 15%.

The reduction in smoking prevalence is welcome, particularly in relation to the significant reduction in the numbers of children who are smoking. These reductions are a result of the cumulative effect of tobacco control legislation, education and public health initiatives taken over the years. These initiatives have ranked Ireland 2nd out of 34 European Countries on the Tobacco Control Scale and earned my Department the 2017 World No Tobacco Day WHO Award for accomplishments in the area of tobacco control.

However, smoking prevalence among adults continues to be a cause of concern. I, together with Minister Harris and my Government colleagues, remain committed to the continued imple-

mentation of the *Tobacco Free Ireland* policy. That policy sets an ambitious target for a smoke free Ireland, with over 60 recommendations which the Government is committed to implementing. Many of these recommendations are completed or are currently under way. Examples include the enactment of legislation to prohibit smoking in cars where children are present, the introduction of standardised packaging for tobacco products, transposition and implementation of the EU 2014 Tobacco Products Directive, the development of legislation to introduce licensing for the sale of tobacco products and e-cigarettes, the development of national smoking cessation guidelines, on-going media campaigns, on-going excise increases on tobacco products, enforcement on the ground of existing and new tobacco control legislation, as well as continued collaboration at EU and WHO levels in the implementation of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

I am confident that the on-going implementation of the *Tobacco Free Ireland* policy will continue to have a positive impact on the smoking prevalence in Ireland.

Hospital Appointments Status

440. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will be given a date for orthognathic surgery to be carried out at the national dental hospital. [39436/17]

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

441. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the actions being taken to improve juvenile arthritis treatment in Cork University Hospital; when a replacement consultant will be put in place; if consideration is being given for a satellite clinic in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39446/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Health Services

442. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the reason funding for the World Health Organization's baby friendly health initiative has stopped; if this decision will be reversed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39450/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The Department of Health and the Health Service Executive (HSE) 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 commit-

ment 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 Well-being 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 Breast-feeding, 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 Breast-feeding Action Plan 2016-2020. These include:

- Improved Governance and health service structures;
- Breast-feeding training and skills development;
- Health service policies and practices;
- Support at all stages of the breastfeeding continuum;
- Research, monitoring and evaluation.

Details of specific actions can be seen in the HSE National Breast-feeding Action Plan 2016-2020 on the HSE website *breastfeeding.ie* and the link

<https://www.breastfeeding.ie/Uploads/breastfeeding-in-a-healthy-ireland.pdf>.

Question No. 443 answered with Question No. 380.

Orthodontic Services Provision

444. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the status of the case of a person (details supplied); and when the person can expect an appointment for orthodontic treatment from the Health Service Executive. [39452/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Administration

445. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect an appointment for surgery. [39473/17]

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.

Injecting Facilities

446. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health his plans to open an injecting room at a location (details supplied) in Dublin 8; the timeframe to open the facility; the number of persons it is expected to serve; the opening times during the day; if this will be a pilot scheme or a permanent facility; the way in which it will be funded; and the length of time it is expected to be operational. [39474/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): On 25 August 2017, the HSE published an invitation on the Government's eTenders website for suitably qualified and experienced service providers to submit tenders to provide a medically supervised injecting centre in Dublin City Centre area on a pilot basis. Tenders must be submitted to the HSE by 25th September 2017. The HSE anticipates that the contract will be awarded by 1st November 2017. The initial contract will be for an 18-month pilot phase with an evaluation at 6 months and again at 18 months.

The provider and the proposed location will be known once the evaluation of the tender submissions is completed by end of October 2017.

As the tender process is still underway, it is not appropriate for me to comment on individual organisations who may be included in the tender process or on the actual opening hours of the Supervised Injecting Facility.

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

Patient Data

447. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on trolleys in Wexford General Hospital in 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017, by month, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39479/17]

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 Staff Data

448. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff employed at Wexford General Hospital in each of the years from 2008 to 2016 and to date in 2017, by profession, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39480/17]

449. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the services available at Wexford general hospital; the additional services planned as part of the HSE service plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39481/17]

450. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of nurses employed at Wexford General Hospital in each of the years from 2008 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39482/17]

451. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the details of all inpatient and outpatient appointments and procedures at Wexford General Hospital, by speciality and by bands (details supplied), in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39483/17]

452. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the capital and operational funding provided to Wexford General Hospital in each of the years from 2008 to 2016 and to date in 2017, by funding stream, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39484/17]

490. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of inpatient and outpatient hospital cancellations at Wexford General Hospital in each of the years from 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39602/17]

491. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of patients from Wexford General Hospital outsourced to other hospitals in each of the years from 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39603/17]

492. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the agency spend by Wexford General Hospital in each of the years from 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39604/17]

493. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the total non-attendance rate for Wexford General Hospital in each of the years from 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39605/17]

494. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of consultants employed at Wexford General Hospital in each of the years from 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39606/17]

495. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of inpatient and outpatient beds open at Wexford General Hospital in each of the years from 2008 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39607/17]

496. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of inpatient and day cases treated at Wexford General Hospital in each of the years from 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39608/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 448 to 452, inclusive and 490 to 496, inclusive, together.

In relation to the queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service issues, I have asked the

HSE to respond to you directly.

Mental Health Services Provision

453. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the mental health services available in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39485/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Primary Care Centres Data

454. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of primary care centres in operation here, by county and by year they were established, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39486/17]

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 Data

455. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of primary health care centres in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39487/17]

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.

Home Help Service Data

456. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of home help hours provided in County Wexford in each of the years 2008 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39488/17]

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

457. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter with regard to a community hospital (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39493/17]

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

458. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will be seen for assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39494/17]

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.

Medical Card Applications

459. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card renewal will be complete for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39499/17]

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

The HSE has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Drug Treatment Programmes

460. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons receiving opioid maintenance treatment; the number of years they have been receiving an opioid substitute, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39503/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): As these are service matters, they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Drug Rehabilitation Clinics

461. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the number of drug and alco-

hol detox beds; the location of each; if they are public or private beds; the number that are for alcohol detox, drug detox or drug and alcohol detox; the waiting list for each category at each location, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39504/17]

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 Waiting Lists

462. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will have a procedure carried out in Beaumont Hospital. [39505/17]

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.

Medical Card Applications

463. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); if all outstanding information in respect of their application has now been received; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39509/17]

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

The HSE has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Dental Services Expenditure

464. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the estimated amount it would cost in 2018 to recruit an additional 100 dentists for the public health service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39516/17]

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

Ambulance Service Provision

465. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the estimated amount it would cost to purchase 25 extra fully kitted out ambulances for the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39517/17]

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

HSE National Service Plan

466. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE service plan 2015 directive regarding rates of pay for sleepovers in the intellectual disability and children and family sector applies to all qualified personnel working in both public and private facilities; and if so, the amount of that rate. [39518/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In September 2014, a Labour Court Recommendation (LCR 20837) issued following a hearing between the HSE and IMPACT, SIPTU and Unite trade unions. The hearing was in respect of the terms under which social care workers and related grades are employed in the children's residential services and the Intellectual Disability Sector in relation to sleepover arrangements.

Following the Labour Court hearing, the Court recommended to the parties that the staff concerned should be paid the minimum wage hourly rate in respect of each hour spent on sleepover in excess of 39 hours.

The Labour Court Recommendation concerned the parties to the hearing, the employer, in this case, being the HSE. Neither the HSE nor the Minister have a role in relation to private service providers. It is a matter for private employers to negotiate salaries with their staff as part of the terms and conditions of their employment.

Mental Health Services Data

467. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the date on which the new 50 bed mental health unit at Galway University Hospital will open; the plans in place to facilitate this transfer; the reason for the delay in opening the unit; the complement of staff necessary to run the unit; if all of those positions have been filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39519/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Mental Health Services Provision

468. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the status of proposals the Galway psychiatric unit has for the provision of outpatient clinics and-or services in Galway

city and county; the status of the proposed outpatient facility at Dangan, County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39520/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Health Services

469. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding a HSE query; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39523/17]

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 Funding

470. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide €40 million additional funding in Budget 2018 to provide for dementia care co-ordinators in each local health office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39546/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): 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.

Dental Services

471. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment can be scheduled to have braces fitted for a person (details supplied). [39547/17]

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

Medical Card Applications

472. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date in the determination of an application for a medical card in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39548/17]

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.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

473. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the freestyle

libre system to be made available under the LTI scheme for persons with diabetes; if availability will not be restricted only to persons with type 1 diabetes but will be made available to all persons on multi daily insulin injections based on clinical need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39554/17]

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

474. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the freestyle libre system to be made available under the LTI scheme for persons with diabetes; if availability will not be restricted only to persons with type 1 diabetes but will be made available to all persons on multi daily insulin injections based on clinical need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39555/17]

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

475. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health when the freestyle libre system will be made available under the long term illness scheme for persons with diabetes; if availability will not be restricted only to persons with type 1 diabetes but will be made available to all persons on multi daily insulin injections based on clinical need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39557/17]

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 Waiting Lists

476. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if a procedure can be expedited for a person (details supplied). [39565/17]

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 Guidelines

477. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide advice in a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39568/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): If an individual is suffering from a mental disorder, they may go into a psychiatric hospital or unit voluntarily, or they may be committed as an involuntary patient.

The process of involuntary detention under the Mental Health Act is a three-step process. The first step requires an applicant (relative, An Garda Síochána, designated officer of the Health Services Executive, or any other person who has concerns about the mental health and welfare of the individual in the community) to make an application.

The second step is for the patient to be reviewed by a General Practitioner. In the event that the General Practitioner is of the view that the person is suffering from a mental disorder and would benefit from a period of treatment in hospital, or if there is a risk of harm by that person to themselves or others, the General Practitioner would complete the second step.

The third step is whereby the consultant psychiatrist on duty in the psychiatric unit reviews the patient. If the psychiatrist, following an assessment agrees that clinically the person requires an in-patient admission under the Act they complete the third step. At this point a person is detained under the Act. The Mental Health Commission website www.mhcirl.ie contains a very useful summary entitled “Your Guide to the Mental Health Act, 2001” which may act as a useful reference guide.

Medical Aids and Appliances Applications

478. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for a reclining chair by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39569/17]

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

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

479. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the freestyle libre system to be made available under the LTI scheme for persons with diabetes; if availability will not be restricted only to persons with type 1 diabetes but will be made available to all persons on multi daily insulin injections based on clinical need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39574/17]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

480. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health if he has given consideration to adding a dietician to the services potentially provided following an assessment of need report being produced for a person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39575/17]

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.

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 Complaints Procedures

481. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health if he will examine complaints made regarding the care of a person (details supplied) in relation to St. James's Hospital, Dublin 8; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39576/17]

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

Disability Services Funding

482. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the position in relation to the provision of funding for a Prader-Willi syndrome pilot project; if he has been liaising with an association (details supplied) on the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39578/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): Earlier this year I was at the launch of the Prader Willi Syndrome National Survey. I also met with the association, the purpose of the meeting was for PWSAI to outline the research findings of "A Population-Based Profile of Prader-Willi Syndrome in Ireland and to make a case for the delivery of respite services specifically catering to the needs of Prader Willi sufferers.

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability. The HSE's Social Care Operational Plan for 2017 aims to provide 182,000 overnight stays in centre-based respite services, in addition to 41,000 day respite sessions. Respite care for children and adults with disabilities is provided by the HSE directly in some instances, or by agencies funded by the HSE to provide services on its behalf.

The HSE remains committed to working with all voluntary disability service providers to ensure that all of the resources available for specialist disability services, including respite services, are used in the most efficient and effective manner possible. And 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 further reply.

Health Care Infrastructure Provision

483. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the details of the appraisal stage for Saint Patricks hospital, Cashel which is included in the capital programme announced in 2016; the details of each of the stages that form part of the capital planning guidelines; the approximate timeframe for each stage based on the HSE's previous project experience; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39579/17]

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 these matters.

Hospital Appointments Status

484. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a case (details supplied); and when the person concerned can expect an appointment. [39581/17]

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

485. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will assist in having a replacement item procured for a person (details supplied) in County Cork in view of the difficulties this person has with their existing equipment. [39582/17]

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

486. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the reason the dental clinic in Castlepollard is being closed and withdrawn to Mullingar (details supplied). [39588/17]

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

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

487. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health when the freestyle libre system

will be made available under the long-term illness scheme for persons with diabetes; if availability will not be restricted only to persons with type 1 diabetes but will be made available to every person on multi-daily insulin injections based on clinical need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39589/17]

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.

Motorised Transport Grant

488. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the progress made to introduce a scheme to replace the motorised transport grant scheme; when such a replacement scheme will likely be operational and open to new applicants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39590/17]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

489. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment will be scheduled for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39598/17]

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. 490 to 496, inclusive, answered with Question No. 448.

Hospitals Car Park Charges

497. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Health the number of car parking spaces available at University Hospital Waterford; the charge in place; the charge in each of the years 2008 to 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39609/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Disability Support Services

498. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the name of the body that inspects buildings to ascertain if their disability access is suitable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39614/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I understand that building inspection is the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Services for People with Disabilities

499. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the number of replacement motorised wheelchairs that are available in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown to be used when an existing person's chair is being repaired or needs replacement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39616/17]

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

500. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied). [39633/17]

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 Home Services

501. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health the details of all publicly run nursing homes in County Wicklow. [39638/17]

502. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Health the details of all privately run nursing homes in County Wicklow. [39639/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 501 and 502 together.

The weekly cost of all approved private and voluntary residential facilities is published on a monthly basis on the HSE website

<http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/olderpeople/nhss/costs.html>.

Details of the cost of care for all public nursing homes is also available on their website.

The Health Information and Quality Authority is an independent authority established under the Health Act 2007. Since 2009 all nursing homes - public, voluntary and private have been registered and inspected by HIQA.

A register of all nursing homes is available on the HIQA website www.hiqa.ie with a breakdown available per county.

Medical Card Administration

503. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health if he will waive the €80 fee which haemochromatosis patients who do not qualify for a medical card must pay each time they get a venesection; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that persons are turning away from treatment due to this charge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39640/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Act 1970 (as amended) provides that all people ordinarily resident in the country are entitled, subject to certain charges, to public in-patient hospital services including consultant services and to public out-patient hospital services. Under the Health (In-Patients Charges) (Amendment) Regulations 2008, a person who has been referred to a hospital for an in-patient service, including that provided on a day case basis, will have to pay the statutory daily charge, currently €80 per day, up to a maximum of €800 per year. On this basis, where venesection is classed as a day case procedure and is not carried out in an out patient setting, the public in-patient charge applies. There are no plans at present to exclude haemochromatosis patients from this charge.

Hospital Waiting Lists

504. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health if financial assistance can be given by the HSE to a person (details supplied) who was unable to wait on a lengthy waiting list due to the severity of the case to have two new knee replacements, the first of which will be done in a private hospital (details supplied) in the near future. [39663/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

505. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health when the freestyle libre system will be made available under the long-term illness scheme for persons with diabetes; if availability will not be restricted only to persons with type 1 diabetes but will be made available to everyone on multi-daily insulin injections based on clinical need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39664/17]

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

506. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the progress of the availability of a medical device for diabetes (details supplied) on the long-term illness scheme; and if the device will also be available for those with type 2 diabetes. [39669/17]

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.

Primary Care Centres Data

507. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the operational primary care centres and the year in which they opened, by county, in tabular form. [39706/17]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Data

508. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the amount of funding paid to private nursing homes under the fair deal scheme for 2015 and 2016; the names of the nursing homes; the location of each nursing home in cases in which subvention has been paid; the amount paid to each participant nursing home on a per annum basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39715/17]

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 Aids and Appliances Provision

509. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if he will assist in the urgent provision of a necessary item of equipment for a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [39716/17]

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

510. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that there is a doctor operating in Ballivor, County Meath, five days a week (details supplied). [39724/17]

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

Home Help Service Eligibility

511. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if a further assessment can be carried out to increase home help hours in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [39734/17]

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

512. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the action he has taken to assist a person (details supplied) who urgently requires a residential placement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39735/17]

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.

Mental Health Services Provision

513. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of mental health supports for a person (details supplied) in Dublin 16; and if he will make a state-

ment on the matter. [39760/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service issue, this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

HSE Staff Data

514. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health the status of unfilled temporary vacant employee positions within a HSE facility (details supplied). [39764/17]

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 Charges

515. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the full year cost in 2018 of abolishing all hospital charges, both overnight and accident and emergency. [39785/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Health Services Data

516. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the full year cost in 2018 of providing free general practitioner care to all. [39786/17]

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

Indicative Annual Cost per Card

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

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

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

The Deputy will be aware of the ongoing review of the GMS and other publicly funded contracts involving GPs, and that the next phase of discussions to progress this work is under-

way. The estimated cost of extending free GP care to all citizens will vary depending on the outcome of these negotiations and any implications they may have for the future scope and content of the general practitioner service, and the relevant fees and payments to GPs. As with any negotiation-type process, and given the range and complexity of the issues to be discussed, the engagement may take some time.

The Deputy will be aware that the Report of the Committee on the Future of Healthcare which was published on 30 May 2017 recommended the phased introduction of universal GP care over the next five years. 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. Work is underway to develop a detailed response to the Report for consideration by Government in December.

Health Services Funding

517. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the full year cost in 2018 of keeping health funding at its current level when taking into account wages, salaries, costs and demographic changes. [39787/17]

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.

Health Services Expenditure

518. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the current funding in the health budget for obesity and chronic disease prevention. [39788/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): Funding for obesity and chronic disease prevention is distributed across a number of departmental and agency programmes and initiatives that may both directly and indirectly relate to such prevention and public health.

The prospect of classifying expenditure along the lines requested by the deputy is remote in the absence of being able to precisely disaggregate spending wholly related to obesity and chronic disease prevention from overall HSE expenditure, which has operational responsibility for these areas. The Deputy may wish to note that the report *A Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan* estimated that the burden of adult obesity in financial terms is €1.13 billion per annum. In this context and as this question relates to a service matter, it has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Home Care Packages Funding

519. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the funding in the health budget for home care packages. [39789/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The overall funding for Service for Older People in 2017 is €765 million. This includes about €373 million for the direct provision of home care and the HSE's National Service Plan provides for a target of:

- 10,57 million Home Help Hours;
- 16,750 Home Care packages; and
- 190 Intensive Home Care Packages for clients with complex needs.

The funding available for Home Care Packages is approximately €149 million. In addition €9 million supported by HSE and Atlantic Philanthropies is available for Intensive Home Care Packages.

Health Services Funding

520. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the funding in the health budget for respite care and personal assistant, PA, services. [39790/17]

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 issues, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

521. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider funding the drug Vimizin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39794/17]

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 Staff

522. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for an ophthalmologist who has resigned to be replaced in a health centre (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the fact that children are left indefinitely waiting for a service while the post is vacant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39795/17]

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

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

523. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the freestyle

libre system to be made available under the long-term illness scheme for persons with diabetes; if the system will not be restricted only to persons with type 1 diabetes but will be made available to all persons on multi-daily insulin injections based on clinical need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39797/17]

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 Reimbursement

524. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health his plans to fund the drug Vimizin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39804/17]

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.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

525. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide persons with multiple sclerosis access to Sativex and to allow the costs to be reimbursed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39805/17]

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.

Medical Card Administration

526. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if a medical card is for life and is not subject to review or modification in cases where the card is issued under EU regulation 883-04; if he will ensure that this right to a medical card is applied in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39806/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Regulation (EC) 883/04 and Implementing Regulation 987/09 provide for the coordination of social security systems, including healthcare, within the EE/EEA and Switzerland, with the aim of ensuring the free movement of persons. This objective of the Regulation is to ensure that persons exercising their right to move and to stay freely within the EU/EEA and Switzerland do not suffer disadvantage.

Medical cards may be issued to EU/EEA citizens under EU Regulation 883/04 if the person is in receipt of a contributory social insurance payment from one, or more, of the Member States, provided they are not receiving a contributory social insurance payment from the Irish State. These medical cards are issued on an individual basis and the income of a spouse/partner is not relevant. EU/EEA citizens who are in receipt of a qualifying payment from another Member State should make an application for a medical card directly to the HSE. Such ap-

plicants are not means tested. The application should be accompanied, as evidence that they are receiving a qualifying payment, by the relevant EU “S” form issued by the Member State making their payment, and as such these cards will be subject to periodic reviews in order to ensure that the person is still in receipt of the qualifying payment.

The HSE has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Status

527. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when required surgery will be facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied); the number of persons awaiting similar surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39807/17]

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

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

528. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if the freestyle libre system will be made available for persons with all types of diabetes under the long-term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39813/17]

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.

European Health Insurance Card

529. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if his Department has estimated the cost of maintaining the European Health Insurance Card, EHIC, for Irish citizens resident in Northern Ireland, post Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39815/17]

530. **Deputy Louise O’Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the work done by his Department to date on the maintenance of the European Health Insurance Card, EHIC, benefits for Irish citizens living in Northern Ireland, post Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39816/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 529 and 530 together.

It is a priority for the Government to ensure that the rights of Irish citizens living in Northern Ireland will be protected through the withdrawal process of the UK from the European Union. In particular, the Government prioritised the protection of the Good Friday Agreement and the maintenance of the Common Travel Area for the withdrawal negotiations.

My Department and its agencies have been conducting analysis on the impacts of Brexit in the area of health. A number of issues, including matters relating to European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), are being examined. The Department is working closely with the Health Service Executive, which has operational responsibility for the EHIC, to examine proposals on the maintenance of the EHIC benefits for Irish Citizens living in Northern Ireland post Brexit.

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. The Government was 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. This is also reflected in the European Commission Task Force paper on Guiding Principles for Ireland/Northern Ireland.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

531. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if specific funding or additional resources will be allocated to enable the appointment of personnel at a hospital (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39855/17]

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.

Community Care

532. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health his plans to allocate additional resources for home support for the remainder of 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39857/17]

533. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health his plans to allocate additional resources to community health area 1 for home support for 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39858/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 532 and 533 together.

The overall funding for Services for Older People is €765 million in 2017 with €367m for direct funding of Home Help and Home Care Packages. A further €9m supported by HSE and Atlantic Philanthropies will provide Intensive Home Care Packages (IHCPs) for people with more complex needs. The HSE's National Service Plan for 2017 provides for a target of 10.57 million Home Help Hours to support about 49,000 people, 16,750 Home Care Packages and 190 Intensive Home Care Packages for clients with complex needs including 60 clients with dementia supported with co-funding from Atlantic Philanthropies under the Irish National Dementia Strategy. This represents a significant increase on home care in comparison to last year's Service Plan, which had an original target of 10.4 million hours home help and 15,450 Home

Care Packages.

Despite this significant level of service provision, the demand for Home Care continues to grow. It is important to note that the allocation of funding for home care across the system, though significant, is finite and services must therefore be delivered within the funding available. The level of activity and associated costs must be managed in each of the nine Community Healthcare Organisations, including CHO 1 in a way that ensures that those with the greatest needs are supported and that the overall expenditure on home care services by the HSE does not exceed the available funding.

The Programme for Government commits to increasing funding for Home Care Packages and Home Help every year. The planning and management of future health expenditure will be considered as part of the annual estimates and budgetary process which seeks to balance available funding across all of the various service areas to achieve the best possible outcomes for the greatest number of service users and prioritise areas of greatest need.

Health Products Regulatory Authority

534. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the Health Products Regulatory Authority, HPRA, project focused on managing medicine shortages after Brexit. [39872/17]

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 minimise 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.

Medical Card Drugs Availability

535. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the reasoning behind the decision to remove a pain relief medication (details supplied) from the medical card scheme; if he will reconsider this decision in view of the effectiveness of this product for chronic pain sufferers and the high price of the medication; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39893/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Medicines play a vital role in improving the overall health of Irish patients. Securing access to existing and new and innovative medicines, is a key objective of the Irish health service. However, the challenge is to deliver this objective

in an affordable and sustainable manner. The medicines bill for the community drugs schemes – primarily the GMS, Long Term Illness, Drugs Payment as well as the High Tech Arrangement – including fees and ingredient costs, is forecast at just over €1.7 billion in 2017. To ensure that patients receive the highest quality care, it is essential that these resources invested in medicines are used efficiently and effectively. This requires an integrated approach to secure best value for money for all treatments, to deliver greater efficiencies across the supply chain and also to promote the use of the most cost-effective treatments.

In 2013, the HSE established the Medicines Management Programme (MMP). It is headed by the National Medicines Information Centre (NMIC) and the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE) in collaboration with the HSE-Primary Care Reimbursement Service (HSE-PCRS) and provides sustained national leadership relating to issues such as the quality of the medicines management process, access to medicines and overall expenditure on medicines.

The Medicines Management Programme has undertaken a number of initiatives aimed at enhancing evidence-based and cost-effective prescribing nationally and the review of Versatis is an example of this.

Versatis 5% medicated plaster is licensed for the symptomatic relief of neuropathic pain associated with previous herpes zoster (shingles) infection, known as post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN), in adults.

Following a review by the MMP of the evidence available to support the use of Versatis, the HSE has introduced a new system for the reimbursement of Versatis from 1 September 2017. This process will support the appropriate use of this medication while ensuring those with an indication of post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN) continue to have access to this treatment.

The product has been reimbursed under the community drugs schemes in Ireland since 2010. Initially, the projected budget impact was low due to the specific licensed indication. However, total expenditure has increased significantly, from €9.4 million in 2012 to over €30 million in 2016, due primarily to off-licence use i.e. prescribing Versatis as a general treatment for pain not associated with shingles. Currently, there are over 25,000 patients in receipt of this item. The MMP prescribing and cost guidance report highlighted that the clinical evidence to support the use of Versatis 5% medicated plaster for PHN is limited due to lack of comparative data and its value is uncertain for all other types of pain.

The NCPE estimated that, in Ireland, between 5-10% of the prescribing of this product is for the licensed indication of PHN.

All patients who currently receive antivirals for shingles, or patients who are prescribed antivirals for the treatment of shingles by their GP in the future, will automatically be approved for Versatis for a period of three months. No action is required by the GP in this instance and the patient's pharmacy will be notified in real time of the patient's approval status.

All patients who are currently initiated on Versatis have been identified and automatically registered on the HSE-PCRS system for a period of three months and will continue to receive the treatment from their pharmacy until 30 November 2017.

From 1 December 2017, non-shingles patients will no longer be dispensed Versatis under the community drugs schemes. The HSE has produced patient information leaflets and advised GPs on treatment alternatives.

In exceptional circumstances, the product may be dispensed for unlicensed indications. In such circumstance, the GP will be required to make an application for reimbursement for unlicensed indications for new and existing patients through the online system.

Where the application is under exceptional circumstances, the application will be reviewed by the MMP before a decision is made and communicated to the GP.

Full details of the review of Versatis are available on the HSE website at

<http://hse.ie/eng/about/Who/clinical/natclinprog/medicinemanagementprogramme/your-medicines/lidocaine-plaster/lidocaine-medicated-plaster.html>

As this is a matter for the HSE, I have no role in this decision in relation to individual treatments. However, I fully support the objectives of the HSE Medicines Management Programme.

Mental Health Services Funding

536. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if he will ensure that the €40 million towards community supports for persons with dementia which is being proposed by an organisation (details supplied) is included in budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39902/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): 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 under way. Pending completion of this process it is not appropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

GLAS Appeals

537. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS appeal by a person (details supplied); when a decision will be expected on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39160/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has received full entitlements in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

In 2016 the person named withdrew the action that had elevated his GLAS application to Tier 2 for approval into the scheme. In accordance with the scheme terms and conditions, as this was the only Tier 2 action, the non-delivery of the action has resulted in the rejection of the GLAS application.

It is understood that the person named lodged an appeal with the Agriculture Appeals Office and that the person named was informed in writing on 1 August 2017 of the decision of that office.

Antimicrobial Resistance

538. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the actions being taken by his Department to encourage a reduction in the use of antimicrobials in animals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39257/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Antimicrobials are one of the most important medical advances of the past 100 years and have become essential for the treatment of bacterial disease in both the human and animal populations. They

are also important tools for the protection of animal welfare.

However, antimicrobials are increasingly under threat from the rise of antimicrobial resistance (AMR). AMR (the ability of micro-organisms to survive in the presence of an antimicrobial agent that in the past was sufficient to kill the micro-organism) is a global public health concern and threatens the very foundations of modern medicine. A UK review on Anti-microbial resistance conducted in 2014, estimates that currently some 700,000 human deaths (50,000 in the USA and Europe) are associated with AMR bacteria annually.

Given the seriousness and cross-sectoral threat posed by AMR, it is necessary for a ‘whole of Government’ or ‘One Health’ approach to tackling the problem across the human health, animal health and environmental sectors. My Department and the Department of Health jointly established a high level National Interdepartmental AMR Consultative Committee in 2015 and this Committee has provided guidance in relation to the development of Ireland’s first National Action Plan on AMR. The overall goal of the National Action Plan on AMR is to ensure, for as long as possible, the availability of effective antimicrobial treatment options for both the human and animal populations, with safe medicines that are quality-assured, used in a responsible way, and accessible to all who need them. The Plan is a comprehensive roadmap, aimed at protecting the efficacy of antimicrobials. It sets out strategic interventions and activities to address AMR and prioritises areas for action in a phased manner, including addressing the prudent use of antibiotics across all sectors.

Rural Development Programme

539. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will extend membership of the EU monitoring committee for the rural development programme to an organisation (details supplied). [39280/17]

552. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will extend membership of the monitoring committee for the rural development programme 2014 to 2020 to an association (details supplied) in view of the fact that the matter has been under consideration for over seven months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39723/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 539 and 552 together.

The Monitoring Committee for Ireland’s Rural Development Programme is already established and was set up in July 2015 in accordance with Article 47 of (EU) Regulation 1303/2015. This is to cover the period for the current RDP which runs from 2014-2020.

My Department has already had some correspondence with named organisation on this matter and I am scheduled to meet with this organisation next week.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Applications

540. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision on an AEOS 3 contract in respect of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; if a ground inspection will be carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39310/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The decision on this case was reviewed by the Department’s Regional Inspector. He upheld the original deci-

sion and informed the herdowner of this by letter dated 28 August 2017.

The letter also pointed out that the person named has the option to appeal the review decision to the independent Agricultural Appeals Office if they so wish.

Grant Aid

541. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will put in place a grant package for fencing materials further to the announcement that farmers are required to have lands fenced off at locations in which cattle are drinking at rivers by 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39315/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The current proposals are part of the Experts Review Group's recommendations for amendments to the current Nitrates regulations. These regulations will not be finalised until the end of the year following a period of public consultation, appropriate assessment and finally negotiation with the European Commission. I will await the outcome of this process before considering next steps.

Nitrates Action Programme Implementation

542. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to have a grant system in place similar to targeted agricultural modernisation schemes, TAMS, for drinking facilities from rivers via a water pump or drinking bowl system (details supplied); if this grant system will be in place before these requirements come into effect; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39316/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The recommendation that farms with grassland stocking rates of above 170kg of Nitrogen (N) per hectare per year from livestock manure be required to fence watercourses 1.5m from the top of the river bank arises from the review of the Ireland's Nitrates Action Programme.

The proposed deadline for the implementation of this recommendation by the affected farmers is 1 January 2021 which will give farmers time to plan for such fencing and provide alternative drinking sources as required.

The provision of additional investment items under TAMS may be considered. This consideration must take into account investments already grant aided and any available budget.

Brexit Issues

543. **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. [39347/17]

544. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans 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. [39349/17]

545. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his

plans 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. [39350/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 543 to 545, inclusive, together.

I fully recognise the enormous challenges Brexit poses for the agrifood and fisheries sectors 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.

With Government support, I and my Department, and its agencies, have introduced measures to help mitigate the exchange rate effects, primarily through the introduction earlier this year of a new €150 million low-cost loan scheme for primary producers. We have also introduced new agri-taxation measures, increased funding under the Rural Development Programme and Seafood Development Programme, and allocated significant additional resources to Bord Bia to provide Brexit-related supports to affected companies and to progress its market diversification activities.

My Department is keeping the market situation under close review and I will be considering what further measures may be required in the light of developments.

Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme Data

546. **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 agriloan scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39351/17]

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

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.

GLAS Applications

547. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 292 and 293 of 13 April 2017, the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39361/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has received full entitlements in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

The 85% advance payment for 2016 has been processed and payment has issued to the person named. Following this payment it appeared that details of one GLAS parcel declared as Low Input Permanent Pasture was not included in the payment calculation

Department officials are actively working to reinstate this action on the online system with a view to issuing any outstanding balance due to the person named.

GLAS Applications

548. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a decision will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39435/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A GLAS 3 application for the person named was received on the GLAS online system on the 15 December 2016. On the basis of the actions applied for the application was ranked but did not meet the minimum score of 16.5 required for entry into the scheme.

The agricultural advisor for the applicant requested a review of the decision to GLAS Division on 7 July 2017. The original decision remained unchanged following this review, the outcome of which was notified by letter dated 27 July 2017. This decision letter also outlined the right to appeal this decision to the Agriculture Appeals Office.

Departmental Funding

549. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the estimated amount the payment increase per hectare would be per proposals (details supplied), in tabular form. [39455/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Based on the figures outlined in the Deputy's question, the relevant increases in payments per hectare would be as follows:

Additional Funding – Millions	Increase per hectare for first 10 hectares of Mountain Type lands
€2.5	€8.80
€5	€17.60
€7.5	€26.39
€10	€35.19
€12.5	€43.99
€15	€52.79
€17.5	€61.58

Additional Funding – Millions	Increase per hectare for first 10 hectares of Mountain Type lands
€20	€70.38

Departmental Funding

550. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the estimated amount the payment increase per hectare would be per proposals (details supplied), in tabular form. [39456/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Based on the figures outlined in the Deputy's question, the relevant increases in payments per hectare would be as follows:

Proposed Additional Funding – Millions	Increase per hectare for first 10 hectares of More Severely Handicapped lands
€2.5	€4.51
€5	€9.03
€7.5	€13.54
€10	€18.05
€12.5	€22.56
€15	€27.08
€17.5	€31.59
€20	€36.10

GLAS Payments

551. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the remaining 15% of a GLAS payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39591/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The above named was approved into GLAS 2 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016.

An 85% advance payment for 2016 has been paid.

Balancing payments amounting to 15% are issuing on an ongoing basis. A Farm Nutrient Management Plan (NMP) must be submitted on behalf of each GLAS 1 and 2 participant to the dedicated online system before these or any future GLAS payment can issue. This is one of the four core requirements of the scheme for all participants. The requirement to submit a plan is clearly set out in the Terms and Conditions of the Scheme.

A NMP has not been received on behalf of the above named. The balancing payment cannot issue until NMP has been submitted.

Question No. 552 answered with Question No. 539.

Legislative Reviews

553. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his

plans following the end of the consultation process for the review of the Agriculture Appeals Act 2001; the way in which he will assure the independence of an appeals process that involves his Department in deciding on an appeal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39725/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Programme for Partnership Government provided for a review of the Agriculture Appeals Act 2001, to ensure the independence and efficiency of the office in dealing with appeals from farmers. In fulfilment of this undertaking, I have established a Review Committee to carry out the review and furnish its Report to me by the end of this year. This will include recommendations as regards the legislation governing, and the future operation of, the Agriculture Appeals Office. Following receipt of the Report, I will consider its findings and/or recommendations.

In order to ensure that the review is as comprehensive as possible, consultation will take place with relevant stakeholders. In this regard, notices inviting written submissions for consideration by the Committee have been placed in the relevant national newspapers. The closing date for receipt of submissions to the Committee is 5.30 p.m. on Friday, 6 October 2017.

GLAS Payments

554. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a GLAS payment (details supplied) will be issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39743/17]

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.

During the 2016 prepayment checking process an issue presented on the computerised crosscheck of Department databases. My officials are actively working to resolve the issue with a view to further processing the application for the 2016 payment as soon as possible.

Flood Relief Schemes

555. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department's flood damage relief measures support scheme for flood-damaged farms in north east County Donegal includes damage to farm roads, tillage crops destroyed, potato crops destroyed, second cut silage destroyed, loss of grazing and the replacement of fencing destroyed by the floods; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39757/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As you may know, I visited the Inishowen Peninsula with my colleague the Minister of State, Deputy Joe McHugh, following the exceptional rainfall of August 22 last to see at first hand some of the very significant problems that a number of farmers faced as a result. I committed during my visit to supporting these farmers, and my Department in conjunction with other State Agencies moved swiftly to offer practical solutions to those affected.

In the immediate aftermath of the flood, I prioritised the availability of support by means of the Animal Welfare Helpline which gives guidance on protecting animal welfare and safety in addition to responding to urgent requirements for emergency feed provision. Staff from my Department and from Teagasc were in the area; Teagasc provided advice to affected farmers in dealing with the immediate challenges that arose.

It is clear that the principal and most widespread impacts of the floods on farms in the Inishowen Peninsula centred on damage to land, fencing, fodder and livestock. To address these pressing issues in the most effective manner, I introduced a targeted measure of assistance.

Support under this measure will apply to losses of livestock, 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. 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.

While it is not possible to address all of the problems the unprecedented rainfall caused on farms in Inishowen, this measure will address the principal impacts on those farmers most affected.

Application forms are now available on my Department's website or from the Direct Payments Unit (Flood Damage Relief Measure), Government Offices, Old Abbeyleix Road, Portlaoise, County Laois. There is also a dedicated helpline and email address, (057) 8674456 and floodreliefscheme@agriculture.gov.ie to support those farmers who wish to make an application.

The closing date for applications is Friday 29 September to allow for prompt processing of requests for support.

Harness Racing Industry

556. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans for the publication of a report (details supplied) into harness racing here in view of the fact that the report was due to be published in April 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39835/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Indecon report to review the Irish Harness Racing sector in Ireland is being examined by officials within my Department and its recommendations are under active consideration. It will be published in due course.

Dairy Equipment Scheme Applications

557. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application for a grant by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39841/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person concerned applied for a grant under the Dairy Equipment Scheme of TAMS II. Equipment was purchased prior to approval being issued in contravention of the Terms and Conditions of the Scheme.

The position has been reviewed in the local office and the original decision has been upheld. The person named has been advised of their right to appeal this decision to the Agriculture Appeals Office.

Aquaculture Licence Applications

558. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when an application for an aquaculture licence by a person (details supplied) will be approved; the progress made with the application to date; if the National Parks and Wildlife Service has been consulted on the matter; the remaining steps left in the process of approval; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39843/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has received new and renewal aquaculture applications from the person referred to by the Deputy. These applications are in respect of sites located within the Slyne Head Peninsula Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Slyne Head Peninsula has been designated by the National Parks and Wildlife Service as a Special Area of Conservation under the EU Habitats Directive. All applications in such areas are required to be appropriately assessed for the purpose of environmental compliance with the EU Birds and Habitats Directives.

An Appropriate Assessment report has now been completed by the Marine Institute in respect of Slyne Head. My Department is currently examining the general licensing issues that arise for consideration as a result of the Appropriate Assessment report.

While the Appropriate Assessment is carried out on a bay-wide basis, each licence application within the bay must be assessed individually. Factors to be considered include location within the bay, species, scale and intensity of production, potential visual impact, etc. All applications, in compliance with the requirements of the applicable legislation, are advertised in order to facilitate public consultation, and submissions or observations received must be considered as part of the licence determination process.

Every effort is being made to expedite the determination of aquaculture licence applications in this bay having regard to all the complexities involved.

Departmental Agencies Staff Data

559. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the names of all persons who have served as chairperson and as ordinary members of the Aquaculture Licence Appeals Board since 2012; the amount of remuneration, travel and subsistence paid to each person in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017; if persons that are public servants received remuneration in breach of the one person one salary rule; if he plans to recover such payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39865/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The names of all persons that have served as chairperson and as ordinary members of the Aquaculture Licence Appeals Board since 2012 to date are set out in the following table.

Issues of remuneration, travel and subsistence, etc. paid to the members are operational matters for the Aquaculture Licence Appeals Board and I have requested the Aquaculture Licence Appeals Board to respond directly to the Deputy on the specific information requested in relation to those matters.

Year		
2012	Chairperson	Mr Mark O'Connell

Year		
	Ordinary Members	Mr Sean Murphy, Mr Mario Minehane, Mr Lorcan O’Cinneide, Mr Michael Sweeney, Mr Brendan Brice, Ms Camilla Keane
2013	Chairperson	Mr Mark O’Connell
	Ordinary Members	Mr Sean Murphy, Dr Owen McIntyre, Mr Michael Sweeney, Mr Brendan Brice, Mr Jim Power Mr Lorcan O’Cinneide
2014	Chairperson	Ms Imelda Reynolds
	Ordinary Members	Mr Sean Murphy, Mr Lorcan O’Cinneide, Mr Michael Sweeney, Mr Brendan Brice, Mr Jim Power, Dr Owen McIntyre
2015	Chairperson	Ms Imelda Reynolds
	Ordinary Members	Mr Sean Murphy, Mr Lorcan O’Cinneide, Mr Michael Sweeney, Mr Jim Power, Dr Owen McIntyre
2016	Chairperson	Ms Imelda Reynolds
	Ordinary Members	Mr Sean Murphy, Mr Lorcan O’Cinneide, Mr Michael Sweeney, Mr Jim Power, Dr Owen McIntyre, Mr Brendan Brice
2017	Chairperson	Ms Imelda Reynolds
	Ordinary Members	Mr Sean Murphy, Mr Michael Sweeney, Mr Jim Power, Dr Owen McIntyre, Mr Brendan Brice

Brexit Issues

560. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will report on the informal Council held in Estonia in the context of Brexit. [39873/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I attended the Informal Council which took place in Tallinn, Estonia earlier this month. Discussions at the Informal Council focused on a discussion paper circulated by the Estonian Presidency entitled “Risk Management: Empowering our farmers with effective tools to manage risks post 2020”. This gave EU Agriculture Ministers the opportunity to consider how to help farmers best prepare for and manage future risks in the context of the ongoing CAP post 2020 discussions. While there was no formal opportunity for Ministers to discuss Brexit, I did avail of the opportunity to discuss its impact informally with my Ministerial counterparts.

I am fully aware that extreme market volatility is an increasing factor in managing farm enterprises, and the impact of Brexit of course plays a significant role in this regard. In addressing market volatility, including any Brexit impact, it will be important for CAP post 2020 to have a flexible toolbox to deal with issues as they arise.

I will of course continue to engage closely with the Commission and with counterparts in other Member States in relation to the potential impact of Brexit on the agri-food sector in Ireland and the EU.

Cyber Security Policy

561. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the role his Department has in ensuring that there is a plan to address the risks on the findings in the national assessment of risk report regarding the prominence of some technological risks being increased including the potential for cyber attacks or data fraud and theft to cause serious disruption. [39104/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment is home to the National Cyber Security Centre, and has responsibility for the National Cyber Security Strategy 2015-2017, which includes measures to improve the security of public sector infrastructure and services, to better protect critical national infrastructure and to formalise arrangements in law in order to comply with EU requirements on cyber security capabilities, co-operation and reporting.

To date, the NCSC has focused on developing capacity and engaging with national and international stakeholders around securing systems and responding to incidents. The NCSC has also worked to collate and analyse data from cyber-attacks and to coordinate with those targeted to introduce mitigation measures.

The Minister is aware of the risks posed by cyber-attacks and data fraud and theft and their potential to cause serious disruption to essential services. The NCSC continues to work with the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer and the Departments and Agencies that own these systems to mitigate and manage these risks.

Community Banking

562. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will examine the possibilities of An Post providing extended community banking facilities including cash lodgement and withdrawal facilities, foreign exchange and so on, in view of the withdrawal of branch banking services from communities here; his views on whether this represents a potential commercial opportunity for An Post; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39129/17]

577. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a union (details supplied) has warned that all post offices in Dublin central are at risk of closure; the post offices in Dublin central which are at risk of closure; and the action he has taken to ensure a continued local post office network to serve the communities of Dublin central. [39653/17]

578. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the action he has taken to implement the recommendations of the Kerr report. [39654/17]

579. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has included an allocation in his budget for 2018 to support the recommendations included in the Kerr report designed to put the post office network on a sustainable footing; and if so, the amount. [39655/17]

580. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the Kerr report; his plans to implement the recommendations of this report in relation to the post office network; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39860/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 562 and 577 to 580, inclusive, together.

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 for the Governance of State bodies and the governance functions included in the statutory framework underpinning An Post. Operational matters are matters for the board and management of An Post. As Minister, I do not have a statutory function in respect of such matters.

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. However, the environment in which the post office operates is changing and the network needs to change to thrive particularly with the move to digital transactions. This involves harnessing existing strengths such as its trusted brand and the relationship of postmasters with individual communities to build the network of the future. The post office plays an important role in serving the needs of business and domestic customers alike and this is at the forefront of An Post's mandate. The Government is fully committed to a sustainable post office network which it sees as a key piece of financial and social infrastructure for both urban and rural areas.

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. This issue is being dealt with by officials in the Department of Community and Rural Development who have been working actively with the Department of Finance over the last number of months to progress these commitments. A public consultation process, seeking views on the community banking model, was launched in early March and ran for four weeks. Officials from both of those Departments 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 Department of Community and Rural Development is currently finalising a report on the merits of establishing a local public banking model in Ireland.

The 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 nearing completion. 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 progressed between my Department and the Department of Community and Rural Development. Naturally, the outcome of the review will impact on the extent to which the recommendations contained in the various reports on the network can be implemented.

Until such time as the review is finalised and assessed it will not be possible to comment on the level of funding that may be required. Government will be briefed once a definitive strategy has been agreed.

Inland Fisheries Stocks

563. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the extent to which his Department has reliable evidence relating to the extent to which salmon stocks have fluctuated in the main rivers and tributaries over the past ten years;

and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39255/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) is the State Agency responsible for the conservation, protection, promotion and development of Ireland's inland fisheries. IFI manages salmon stocks on an individual river basis as each of Ireland's 147 salmon rivers (including river sections and estuaries) has its own genetically unique stock of salmon which migrates to sea as juveniles and returns to the same river as mature salmon to spawn and propagate the next generation of salmon distinctive to that river.

In 2006, the Government affirmed its commitment to manage the wild salmon fishery in line with the scientific advice in the interests of conservation of stocks. Since 2007, the harvest of salmon, by commercial fishing and recreational angling, has been restricted to those rivers that are meeting their individual conservation limits for wild salmon. Each river has an individual conservation limit (CL) which is essentially the number of salmon required to spawn to maintain a healthy population.

IFI is supported in its management role by an independent Standing Scientific Committee (SSC), comprising scientists from a range of organisations. Assessing the status of stock involves the challenges of counting live aquatic animals in a dynamic fluvial environment. Scientific and management assessments of stocks are carried out every year with IFI engaged in an extensive stock monitoring programme which feeds into the scientific committee's annual reviews. In this way, fluctuations in individual stocks are discernible on an annual basis.

In assessing the status of salmon stocks for any particular river, the scientific committee draws on a number of data sets. The primary index for evaluation of likely returning numbers is the recorded rod (harvest or catch and release) and commercial catch (if any). Data from fish counters and the results from catchment wide electro-fishing are also used.

Robust annual estimates are based on an average of the data over the most recent five years. The use of a five year average ensures that a "good" or "bad" year in terms of salmon returns does not disproportionately impact assessments.

If the estimate of returning salmon is above the individual conservation limit then salmon from that individually genetic river population may be harvested commercially or by rod and line. Recommendations as to the status of each river are published and, following a 30 day public consultation, the future catch options associated with each individual river/estuary for the following fishing season is set.

The salmon assessment and management methodologies used in Ireland are considered best practice internationally and within the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO), with many other countries moving towards the development of similar models for salmon stock conservation.

Inland Waterways Maintenance

564. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will expedite permanent work to be carried out on a specific project (details supplied) in County Cork. [39601/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Cork County Council is the authority responsible for carrying out works to the weir and for the funding of same. I understand that both a project to ensure a per-

manent solution to fish passage and a project to ensure temporary repairs, while the permanent solution is awaited, are required.

My Department and Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) have been liaising with the Council to advise how any proposed works can be consistent with fisheries and environmental obligations, particularly the EU Habitats Directive. The engineering advisors of the Council and the Department have also agreed the essential details of the permanent proposals and the Department has agreed to the Council's temporary repair proposals.

The Council has advised my Department that it is involved in land acquisition in respect of its permanent project proposals and, once this is complete, have undertaken to set out a timetable for the commencement and completion of works.

IFI have been in regular contact with Cork County Council over recent months seeking to progress matters and, on 6 September last, requested a further meeting with the Council, particularly as regards both the permanent and interim works and compliance with the EU Habitats Directive. A response is awaited from the Council

The Council have also advised the estimated project costs to my Department. Funding is entirely a matter for the Council, and funds for this and similar projects are not provided for within my Department's Vote.

Mobile Telephony Services

565. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the definition of 5G; if there will be nationwide 5G coverage; and if he will provide a timeframe and cost for such coverage in view of the fact that the Government has now signed an international commitment on this. [39121/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): On 18 July 2017 at the Informal Meeting of Ministers for Telecommunications and Competitiveness in Tallinn, the Minister for Community Development, Natural Resources and Digital Development, Seán Kyne TD, signed the 5G Declaration for Europe, along with colleagues from all 28 EU Member States.

The 5G declaration of intent confirms the willingness of EU Member States to position Europe as a global leader in digital. 5G commonly refers to the 5th generation of mobile network services proposed to replace the current 4G standards of mobile telecommunication. 5G is the future network infrastructure which will allow for the level of connectivity required to support new digital services, such as smart homes and smart agriculture, which will harness data to boost efficiencies. Such services will have the potential to transform how we live and work in the future.

Coverage and Connectivity are core issues in the Declaration and Ireland believes strongly in connectivity for every citizen, as evidenced by our National Broadband Plan which aims to ensure high speed broadband for every home and business in Ireland. With its extensive geographic spread, this network will support the future roll-out of 5G on a wide geographic basis, supporting backhaul for mobile markets, so that all communities across the country may benefit from the advantages that 5G will bring.

Ireland is firmly committed to rolling out future 5G, most recently demonstrated by the successful completion of the 3.6Ghz band auction, which has the potential to support 5G services. This places Ireland at the forefront of Europe in terms of being able to harness the opportunities

that 5G technology can present in the future.

The Declaration builds on the European Commission's 5G Action Plan published in September 2016, which is a strategic initiative concerning all stakeholders, private and public, small and large, in all Member States, to meet the challenge of making 5G a reality for all citizens and businesses by the end of this decade.

Broadband Service Provision

566. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the plans put in place by a company (details supplied) for the house and business connections following the completed broadband roll-out in individual areas in the blue and light blue areas; if this is being subcontracted; the proposed individual cost per home and business for connection; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39209/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): 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 roll-out are published on my Department's website. The Quarter 2 2017 figures have been verified by my Department and the eir roll-out is in line with the Commitment Agreement.

With regard to this roll-out, decisions as to the individual connection costs per home and business is an operational matter determined by eir. My Department has no input in that process.

Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available from eir at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>.

Customers seeking connectivity to eir's network should, in the first instance, access this website to determine the connectivity availability status for their eircode. The website also provides a list of retail service providers who offer services in the area.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

567. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of broadband enabling for an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39235/17]

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 map shows that the townland of Knockanainane West, Co Kerry comprise some 66 premises. Of these, 47 premises fall within eir's 300k planned rural deployment with the remaining 19 premises being covered by the State Intervention.

Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available from eir at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/> .

Your constituent can access this website to determine the connectivity availability status for their premise using their eircode. The website also provides a list of retail service providers who offer services using eir's high speed fibre network in the area.

Those premises within the State Intervention area form part of my Department's on-going procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network. That procurement process is now at an advanced stage, with "Detailed Solutions" to be submitted by bidders later this month.

Broadband Service Provision

568. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the considerations which were given to rolling out an all-island broadband network; the detail of meetings between Irish and Northern Ireland and or UK officials to discuss the possibility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39309/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): There have been no meetings between officials from my Department and our Northern Ireland counterparts in relation to an all island broadband network. Achieving universal access to high speed broadband is a key target under the EU Digital Agenda for Europe which requires, inter alia, all Member States to publish National Broadband Plans to facilitate the achievement of high speed broadband access of at least 30Mbps to all citizens. The link to the Study on National Broadband Plans in the 28 EU-Member States is available at <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/broadband-member-states>

The Irish Government committed to facilitating investment with policy and regulatory support and to funding a State intervention to provide high speed broadband to all premises in the State.

The 2012 National Broadband Plan (NBP) published in August 2012 outlined the Government's commitment to deliver high speed broadband to every citizen and business in Ireland, regardless of location. Delivery of High Speed Broadband is a specific priority under the Programme for Government and reflects European objectives.

Ireland's telecommunications market has been liberalised since 1999 and has developed into a well-regulated market, supporting a multiplicity of commercial operators providing services over a telecommunications network. The State is not a service provider and can only intervene, subject to EU competition rules, to ensure access to broadband services in areas where the competitive market has failed to deliver such services.

Energy Schemes

569. **Deputy Kate O’Connell** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to review the application process for the SEAI better energy warmer homes grant to include those that are on low income but do not receive fuel allowance, job seeker’s allowance, family income supplement or one parent family payment (details supplied). [39319/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): 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 scheme is delivered through a combination of SEAI appointed Community Based Organisations (CBOs), augmented by a panel of private contractors in order to ensure national coverage. The measures available include draught proofing, attic insulation, lagging jackets for hot water tanks, low energy light bulbs, cavity wall insulation and energy advice. To date nearly 125,000 homes have benefitted from an energy efficiency upgrade under the scheme.

Since the scheme is 100% Exchequer funded it is my responsibility to ensure that it is targeted at those most in need of Government assistance. The eligibility criteria for the scheme is determined through the use of the existing indicators that the Deputy refers to. These indicators, having regard to the resources that the State can make available, identify people in energy poverty.

In the Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty, the Government has committed to keeping the eligibility criteria for the Warmer Homes scheme under review to ensure that the indicators in use are consistent with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection’s findings on deprivation in general. In particular I would note that while the scheme was initially only open to homeowners in receipt of the National Fuel Allowance, it has since been expanded to families in receipt of family income supplement and job seekers allowance with young children, as there are health and well-being consequences to living in a cold and damp home and children can often be particularly vulnerable to these conditions. It was further extended to cover tenants in voluntary housing and those in receipt of the one parent family payment as these groups suffer from a particularly high deprivation rate in Ireland.

Broadband Service Speeds

570. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a location (details supplied) can expect to receive a broadband upgrade in view of the fact the current levels of broadband speed at this address are unsatisfactory; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39343/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): 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 map shows that the relevant townland in Boycetown, Kilcock comprises 359 premises and broadband coverage will be realised through a mix of commercial investment and through the State Intervention under the National Broadband Plan (NBP). 319 of these premises are covered by existing commercial operators, 36 premises fall within eir's 300k planned rural deployment and 4 fall within the State Intervention Area. Therefore, depending on the exact eircode of the address the constituent may either be in a BLUE or AMBER area of the High Speed Broadband Map.

Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available from eir at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>.

Citizens can access this website to determine the connectivity availability status for their premise using their eircode. The website also provides a list of retail service providers who offer services using high speed fibre network in the area.

Those premises within the State Intervention area form part of my Department's on-going procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network. That procurement process is now at an advanced stage, with "Detailed Solutions" to be submitted by bidders later this month.

Broadband Service Provision

571. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the timeframe for a location (details supplied) to have high speed broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39372/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): 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.

eir signed a agreement with me in April last committing 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 roll-out are published on my Department's website. The Quarter 2 2017 figures have been verified by my Department and the eir roll-out is in line with the Commitment Agreement.

The position in relation to the eircode referred to by the Deputy is that the premise 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/>.

Customers seeking connectivity to eir's network should, in the first instance, access this website to determine the connectivity availability status for their eircode. The website also provides a list of retail service providers who offer services using high speed fibre network in the area.

Public Procurement Regulations

572. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if semi-State bodies and agencies under his Department's remit, including RTE, are required to engage in a public tendering process in accordance with competition law when awarding contracts for contracted work for those bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39415/17]

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.

Energy Schemes

573. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the complaint resolution mechanisms that are in place when an Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, SEAI, registered contractor fails to complete work to a satisfactory standard. [39463/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): 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). Since the scheme's launch, some 200,000 homes have received an SEAI grant for energy efficiency improvements.

SEAI maintains a register of contractors who are authorised to undertake works under the Better Energy scheme. Each contractor on the register is required to undertake all works for which grant support is payable in accordance with the technical specifications of the scheme, demonstrate their tax compliance and insurance cover and cooperate with the scheme's Quality Assurance (QA) programme.

The QA programme has been designed by SEAI to maintain high standards of contractor workmanship; build consumer confidence; monitor health and safety; and ensure proper governance of the spending of public money. Regular inspections of works are undertaken on a risk-based approach in accordance with international best practice. When sub-standard works are found, contractors are required to rectify the works to the satisfaction of the inspector, at no cost to the home-owner.

These inspections are performed by independent experts, who were procured by SEAI following an extensive public tendering process in accordance with EU and Irish public procurement rules. Over the past year, these inspectors have completed 3,400 home inspections.

SEAI deal with all complaints received appropriately and this informs the risk-based approach to inspections. The case by case review of any complaints may inform desk based investigations and/or site visits where deemed appropriate.

If a householder has a dispute with a contractor regarding non-SEAI related work, that is a civil dispute between the householder and contractor and one in which SEAI does not play a role.

Energy Schemes

574. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a home that previously received funding under the better energy warmer homes scheme for a specific measure, for example attic insulation, is then ineligible for further grants under the better energy warmer homes scheme. [39464/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): 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 scheme is delivered through a combination of SEAI appointed Community Based Organisations (CBOs), augmented by a panel of private contractors in order to ensure national coverage. The measures available include draught proofing, attic insulation, lagging jackets for hot water tanks, low energy light bulbs, cavity wall insulation and energy advice. To date nearly 125,000 homes have benefitted from an energy efficiency upgrade under the scheme.

Over the scheme's lifetime, the works offered have evolved to keep pace with technological developments and higher technical standards. The standards that apply to the scheme's delivery today are set by the National Standards Authority of Ireland's Code of Practice on Setting the Standard for Energy Efficient Retrofit (SR54) which came into force in 2014.

There are more than 400,000 homes in Ireland eligible for upgrade under the Warmer Homes scheme and to date the scheme has upgraded approximately 125,000 of these. With the limited resources available to the scheme, priority must be given to those who have never received works under the scheme. This precludes the scheme from revisiting most past participants. However, as I announced at this year's Energy Action Conference on Energy Poverty, the Warmer Homes scheme now accepts applications from past participants where no wall insulation whatsoever was offered. So in the case of a person who has only received attic insulation previously under the scheme they are now eligible to reapply and receive cavity wall insulation, assuming their home is suitable for such.

Energy Schemes

575. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of an SEAI complaint (details supplied). [39465/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I have no function in relation to individual grant applications to the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). Queries in relation to individual applications are an operational matter for the SEAI. In addition, the SEAI has established a specific email address for queries from Oireachtas members, which can be sent to oireachtas@seai.ie and will be dealt with promptly.

However, I understand that communications between the applicant and SEAI on this particular case are on-going and the matter is receiving the necessary consideration.

Broadband Service Provision

576. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when a person (details supplied) will receive access to broadband; and if he

will make a statement on the matter. [39501/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): 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 area referred to by the Deputy shows that the townland of Hodgestown, Co Kildare comprises some 79 premises. Of these, 66 premises fall within eir's 300k planned rural deployment with the remaining 13 premises being covered by the State Intervention.

Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available from eir at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>. Customers can access this website to determine the connectivity availability status for their premise using their eircode. The website also provides a list of retail service providers who offer services using eir's high speed fibre network in the area. With regard to this roll-out, decisions as to when areas and premises are served, is an operational matter for eir. My Department has no input in that process.

Those premises within the State Intervention area form part of my Department's on-going procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network. That procurement process is now at an advanced stage, with "Detailed Solutions" to be submitted by bidders later this month.

Questions No. 577 to 580, inclusive, answered with Question No. 562.

Road Improvement Schemes

581. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will re-establish the local road improvement scheme which was discontinued in view of the fact it is vital for the upkeep of significant road mileage in rural Ireland some of which has not been addressed for many decades; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39148/17]

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 Community Involvement and Local Improvement Schemes, I will review the scope for making a separate grant allocation once allocations on foot of the Review of the Capital Plan are decided.

Superannuation Schemes

582. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to concerns raised regarding the funding proposal submitted to the pensions authority regarding the CIÉ superannuation 1951 pension scheme; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that there was no consultation with the trade union group or the active membership of the pension scheme; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that the CIÉ superannuation 1951 pension committee is now preparing to submit a new funding proposal containing measures that will seriously diminish members’ pension benefits; his views on whether it is fair that the pension benefits of the active membership of the CIÉ superannuation 1951 pension committee schedule should be diminished as a result of a number of issues (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39551/17]

583. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason a committee (details supplied) has declined the request of approximately 450 active employees for funding for an independent legal opinion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39552/17]

584. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason a person (details supplied) has sought to retrospectively impose financial restrictions on funding for an independent actuary for the CIÉ superannuation pension scheme 1951, in view of the unrestricted independent actuarial advice made available to the TUG to facilitate the 1994 CIÉ pensions rationalisation agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39553/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 582 to 584, inclusive, together.

The issue raised is a matter for CIÉ 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.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

585. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a capital sports grant application (details supplied); when an announcement of funds allocated is expected under the sports capital programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39049/17]

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 referred to by the Deputy. 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.

Bus Services

586. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 1830 of 20 June 2017, if there have been improvements to the bus service 458 between Blacklion and Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39085/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Road Projects

587. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he has received correspondence from the relevant local authority regarding the funding of a planned pedestrian foot bridge adjacent to the R257 route spanning the Clady river at An Bun Beag in County Donegal; if so, the progress that has been made to deliver this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39111/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As I explained to the Deputy in PQ 5361/17, the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in its area, is a statutory function of each road authority in accordance with the provisions of section 13 of the Roads Act, 1993. Works on such roads are a matter for the relevant local authority to be funded from its own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of projects to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

My Department has not received an application from Donegal County Council for funding a pedestrian bridge at Bun Beag.

Donegal did submit an application under the Bridge Rehabilitation Grant Programme for strengthening works at the existing bridge at Bunbeg. I announced the 2017 regional and local road grant allocations on 24 January and €15,000 has been allocated for the bridge at Bunbeg. Given the current spending constraints it is the Department's policy when grant applications are received from local authorities for bridge improvement works to prioritise rehabilitation works over widening projects and proposed new bridges.

Noise Pollution

588. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the body he plans to appoint as the appeals body to make judgments in circumstances in which an appeal is taken against a decision of the IAA or an existing noise-related decision of An Bord Pleanála in line with the requirements of EU Regulation 598/2014 and the need to introduce a statutory

instrument to appoint the IAA as the competent authority under this regulation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39115/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): EU Regulation No 598/2014 establishes rules and procedures with regard to the introduction of noise-related operating restrictions at Union airports in accordance with the Balanced Approach developed by the International Civil Aviation Organisation. Officials in my Department are currently working closely with the Office of the Attorney General determining the appropriate legislative arrangements to give full effect and implementation to the provisions of Regulation 598/2014 and to bring those legislative arrangements to completion urgently. These legislative arrangements will include putting in place an appropriate appeals mechanism with regard to the decisions of the competent authority, with responsibility for aircraft noise at Dublin airport, as required under Article 4 of the Regulation. Consequently, I am not in a position, at this point in time, to provide precise details on the appeals mechanism or indeed other aspects of the legislative arrangements required to give full effect to Regulation 598/2014 until such time as the Attorney General's Office completes its work and subsequent advice to my Department on the matter.

Road Projects Status

589. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the timeframe for the M7 widening to three lanes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39117/17]

590. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the schedule for widening the M7 to three lanes is delayed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39118/17]

591. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the works being carried out on the M7 are on budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39119/17]

592. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost of the M7 upgrades; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39120/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 589 to 592, inclusive, together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

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

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's questions to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Projects

593. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is

satisfied with the legal basis which allows TII and local authorities to freeze development on lands that have been identified for road projects despite those projects being delayed or cancelled owing to funding or alternative route identification; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39128/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy in relation to the public roads programme.

Under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2015, Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) has responsibility for the planning and supervision of works for the construction and improvement of national road projects in conjunction with the road authorities concerned.

The construction and improvement of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the relevant road authority under section 13 of the Roads Act, 1993.

The Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government has overall responsibility for the Planning and Development Acts under which planning authorities are responsible for making decisions on planning applications and An Bord Pleanála is responsible for considering appeals in relation to planning applications. I have no function in relation to the planning process.

It is a matter for local authorities, in their capacity as planning authorities and given their functions under the Roads Acts, to assess how to best balance planning needs with the protection of route corridors for future road projects.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

594. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a capital sports grant application by a club (details supplied); when an announcement of funds allocated is expected under the sports capital programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39150/17]

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 referred to by the Deputy. 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 Projects

595. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be provided for the N4 in the budget in view of the fact that a new road is required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39212/17]

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 proj-

ects 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 question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Projects

596. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be put in place to build an extension or new road on the section of the N5 road between Tarmonbarry and Frenchpark; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39213/17]

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

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Projects

597. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to build a dual carriageway or motorway between Mullingar and Castlebar; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39214/17]

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 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 question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Rail Services

598. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will open the Claremorris to Galway train line; if funding will be in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39215/17]

604. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the Ennis to Galway and Limerick line will be kept open in view of positive figures on journeys taken in the week commencing 4 September 2017; and if he will make a statement on the mat-

ter. [39221/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 598 and 604 together.

My Department's 2015 Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport 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 in response to that consultation process which have now all been examined and the NTA is preparing a report of those submissions.

In advance of that, no decisions have or will be taken regarding matters such as the future of individual rail lines.

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. Once agreed by Government, the approach which that Framework adopts toward land-use planning and settlement patterns for the country will have significant impacts on the potential of rail and other transport infrastructure and services into the future. I look forward to the finalisation and adoption by Government in the coming months of the new National Planning Framework, which I believe will form an important context for my consideration of issues raised by the Rail Review Report and any recommendations I will bring to Government.

Road Network

599. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will restore the roads budget for county councils back to 2008 levels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39216/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Funding for the national, regional and local road network has been reduced significantly across the board since 2008 when funding was €2.3 billion. The funding this year is around €760 million.

The Capital Plan published in September 2015 outlined proposed transport investment priorities to 2022 and was framed by the conclusions reached in my Department's Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport (SFILT). Based on the findings in that report it is envisaged that maintenance and renewal of the road network will continue to be the main priority over the next period and the bulk of the roads capital budget, approximately €4.4 billion, is earmarked for such essential work.

As part of work to determine a SFILT, my Department's Economic and Financial Evaluation Unit assessed and estimated the level of expenditure required to maintain the current land transport system in its 'steady state', a key element of which is the national, regional and local road network.

The estimate for regional and local roads is based on industry standards, asset management best practice and conservative cost estimates. It is based on a minimum annual output of providing surface sealing on 5% of the network, road strengthening on 5% of the network and general maintenance and repairs on the totality. The analysis points towards a conservative estimate of €580 million gross per annum (including local authority own expenditure) to keep the regional

and local road network in a steady state condition.

For the national road network the steady state analysis includes the cost of pavement works, signs and lines, safety works, bridge works, routine maintenance, small works and costs associated with programme support and network management. The analysis conducted determined that on average the gross steady state requirement for national roads is c. €580 million per annum (using 2015 as the basis).

Based on the existing Capital Plan it is envisaged that 'steady state' funding for the national, regional and local road network will be achieved over the lifetime of the plan.

Road Network

600. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department is putting funding in place for an outer ring road for Galway city; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39217/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and operation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in

conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

The transport element of the Capital Plan makes provision for a number of national road projects to commence during the plan period, including the Galway City Ring Road, subject to necessary project approvals.

Rail Services Provision

601. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of new carriages Iarnród Éireann is buying for its fleet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39218/17]

602. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if Iarnród Éireann is refurbishing 28 train carriages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39219/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 601 and 602 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and for overall funding in relation to public transport. Iarnród Éireann operates the heavy rail network and is responsible for assessing rolling stock requirements for the heavy rail network in conjunction with the National Transport Authority.

Noting the responsibilities of the agencies in this regard, I have referred the Deputy's question to Iarnród Éireann for direct reply. Please advise my office if you have not received a reply within 10 working days.

Rail Services

603. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there are more carriages being added to the Dublin to Westport train in view of the fact that it is frequently overcrowded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39220/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is an operational matter for Iarnród Éireann in conjunction with the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Question No. 604 answered with Question No. 598.

Sports Capital Programme Administration

605. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the sports capital grants will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39222/17]

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 to be in a position to make an announcement regarding allocations in the coming weeks.

Budget 2018

606. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department will increase the funding for the local transport sector in budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39223/17]

608. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason Dublin is getting more funding for transport infrastructure than other regions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39225/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 606 and 608 together.

As part of the 2018 estimates process, my Department is currently finalising a submission to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform outlining priorities for funding in 2018. When my Department's allocation is confirmed, decisions will be made regarding appropriate level of funding for all programmes under my areas of responsibility.

As you are aware my Department is responsible for many programmes that involve investment throughout the whole country e.g. various road schemes, Tourism measures, Sports Capital Grants, Greenways, etc.

As regards road transport infrastructure, the four Dublin Councils became self-funding for regional and local roads under the main road grant categories from 2015 as a result of the arrangements in place in relation to Local Property Tax receipts. This means that State grant

funding for regional and local roads is primarily directed to local authorities outside Dublin. Provision was made in the current Capital Plan for a strategic scheme to upgrade roads in the vicinity of Grange Castle Business Park. This project together with the Naas Bypass Widening/Sallins Bypass scheme are the only major road upgrades in the Greater Dublin Area provided for in the Capital Plan. All other major road improvement projects are outside of the Greater Dublin Area.

The focus of the €3.6 billion investment in the Public Transport Capital Programme over the 7-year period of the Government's Capital Plan, particularly in the early years of the Plan, is on achieving essential steady state maintenance of our public transport network to ensure that it remains safe and fit for purpose.

It is not possible to draw a clear line between investments in the Greater Dublin Area and outside of Dublin in all cases. Approximately €1.3bn of the overall funding for public transport over the period of the capital plan is required for maintenance of the heavy rail network which benefits all areas of the network.

A further €250m approximately is provisionally allocated for other improvements to the heavy rail network. While this includes almost €70m for phase one of the DART expansion programme and €30m for other heavy rail projects in the Greater Dublin Area, over €150m is allocated for the City Centre Re-signalling project, development of the Central Traffic Control Centre and ticketing programmes which will deliver benefits across the whole rail network.

The light rail network in Dublin, including completion of Luas Cross City, and new Metro North will receive approximately €1bn over the period of the capital plan.

Over €800m is provisionally allocated for development of the bus system throughout the country. Funding is also provided to continue development and further roll-out of the Leap Card Scheme over the period of the capital plan. The scheme is now available in the regional cities and the Greater Dublin Area and is being rolled out nationally on a gradual basis. The capital plan also provides over €70m for sustainable transport projects in the regional cities and accessibility programmes.

My Department continues to provide funding to local authorities throughout the country through the Smarter Travel and Active Travel Towns programmes, which help deliver transport infrastructure, including cycle lanes, to areas outside of the Greater Dublin area.

Haulage Industry Regulation

607. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department will include in the budget that foreign lorries pay a tariff on the roads similar to the tariff hauliers pay in other countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39224/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Road charging systems for Heavy Goods Vehicles have been introduced in a number of EU Member States under Directive 1999/62/EC, as modified by Directives 2002/38/EC and 2011/76/EU. These Directives set out the legal basis for charging HGVs for the use of road infrastructure and authorise Member States, if they so wish, to levy user charges, which can be time-based, for example, per day, week or year, or distance-based, calculated on the number of kilometres driven. Any such charges must apply to all HGVs, both domestic and foreign, using the Member State's road infrastructure.

The introduction of a road user charge for HGVs in Ireland is under consideration by my Department as an option in the medium to long-term future.

Question No. 608 answered with Question No. 606.

Road Traffic Offences

609. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department has considered the confiscation of vehicles with learner plates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39226/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I understand that the question relates to circumstances where a learner driver is not accompanied by a qualified driver.

Learner drivers are issued with learner permits subject to certain conditions, one of which is having an accompanying qualified driver. The permit is not a licence, but a permit to drive while learning, and learners must be accompanied by a qualified driver in order to be covered by the terms of their permits.

When a learner driver is identified driving unaccompanied, they receive in the first instance a fixed charge notice with a charge of €80. This places the offence in the highest bracket for fixed charges. If they do not pay the fixed charge and are subsequently convicted in court they face a fine of up to €1,000 for a first offence, €2,000 for a second or subsequent offence, and €2,000 and/or up to three months in prison for a third or subsequent offence within a twelve month period. They will also receive 2 penalty points on payment of a fixed charge or 4 on conviction in court.

I have no plans at present to allow An Garda Síochána to seize vehicles driven by unaccompanied learners, but I remain open to considering any measures which will improve road safety.

Road Projects

610. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason he will not liaise with the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to resolve the problem with the N59; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39227/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister 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 the N59) is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with Galway County Council.

Notwithstanding the above, it is my understanding that it is a condition of An Bord Pleanála's consent that work on the upgrade of the Oughterard to Maam Cross section of the route is subject to the agreement of method statements by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

It is also the case that planning consent was refused for the upgrade of the Maam Cross to Clifden section of the route and the alignment, therefore, that needs to be re-examined before a revised scheme can be considered.

The upgrade of the N59, therefore, involves significant issues relating to meeting planning consent requirements. These issues have to be addressed by the parties directly involved and in accordance with the statutory planning process in which neither I nor Minister Humphreys has a role.

I do understand from TII that method statements for ground investigation works for the Maam Cross to Bunnakill section of the N59 have recently been approved by NPWS.

Light Rail Projects Provision

611. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he envisages bringing a Luas type transport system to Galway city; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39228/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): A transport strategy for Galway City was prepared by the National Transport Authority in partnership with Galway City Council and Galway County Council in 2016. The strategy sets out an overall framework for the development of transport infrastructure and services in Galway City and its environs over a twenty-year period. It was included in the new City Development Plan which was adopted by the City Council and came into force in January 2017.

I understand that the issue of light rail was considered in the preparation of the Transport Strategy for Galway City, but it was concluded that there is insufficient demand to justify the significant additional cost of developing a light rail system so bus transport will provide the backbone of the public transport network under the strategy. The implementation of the strategy is primarily a matter for the local authority to pursue.

Stadium Projects

612. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will contribute to a multi-purpose sports stadium for the west of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39229/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin) (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The Sports Capital Programme (SCP) is the Government's primary vehicle to support the development of sports facilities and the purchase of sports equipment. The most recent rounds of the programme were in 2012, 2014 and 2015.

The 2017 round of the SCP closed for applications on 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 to be in a position to make an announcement regarding allocations in the coming weeks.

The 2017 SCP is now closed for applications. Any organisation interested in applying for funding under future rounds should register first at www.sportscapitalprogramme.ie.

Sports Funding

613. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is ensuring that there is far more transparency in place before Government funding is given to the sporting organisations involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39230/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): 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 (NGBs). As part of the funding process, NGBs are required to submit an annual application which includes an Operational Plan and a Financial Budget for the upcoming year. Sport Ireland sets terms and conditions in relation to the funding provided, including financial reporting requirements. Sport Ireland monitors those bodies in order to ensure proper financial auditing and governance standards.

I have referred the Deputy's question to Sport Ireland to provide more detail directly to him. I would ask the Deputy to inform my office if a reply is not received within 10 days.

Since 2013 Sport Ireland has been encouraging all sports bodies to adopt the Governance Code for Community, Voluntary and Charitable Organisations. The Governance Code asks organisations to commit to key principles in areas such as leadership, transparency and accountability. Since 2016 a greater emphasis has been placed on corporate governance and last November the NGBs were informed that adoption of the Governance Code would become a condition for Sport Ireland funding. All Sport Ireland funded bodies are required to start the process of adopting the code this year, on a "comply or explain basis", with adoption to be completed by 2020. Sport Ireland has advised that, to date, 53 NGBs have signed up to the code - 11 have fully adopted it with 42 having partially adopted it with a view to full adoption as soon as possible.

In relation to the Sports Capital Programme, the latest round closed for applications on 24th February last. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications were received. All applications are currently being assessed by officials in my Department and I expect to be in a position to make an announcement regarding allocations in the coming weeks. It should be noted that the full scoring system and assessment criteria is available on my Department's website. Details of all allocations and payments under the Sports Capital and Local Authority Swimming Pools Programmes are also published on the Department's website.

Regional Airports

614. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if additional funding can be secured for Knock airport in view of the fact that it is the most important transport hub in the west; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39231/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Aviation Policy recognises that Ireland West Airport Knock (IWAK) plays a regional role in terms of access than other airports given its location in the North West.

Funding for IWAK is made available under the Regional Airports Programme which provides support towards safety and security related projects/activities at the airport as well as the other three regional airports in Donegal, Kerry and Waterford.

IWAK has received over €22m in funding under the various schemes in the Regional Airports Programme over the last 10 years to end 2016. In relation to 2017, out of a total allocation of €1.9 million for capital projects under the CAPEX scheme, approval has been conveyed to IWAK for capital projects totalling €1.1 million. Work on those projects is under way.

Under this CAPEX Scheme, the generally applicable aid contribution under the EU Guidelines for these types of investment is 75%. I am aware that IWAK believes that it will require up to 90% grant aid in order to implement the larger safety and security related projects. There is provision under the EU Guidelines that, in exceptional cases, a separate submission may be made to the EU Commission for consideration to exceed the 75% aid threshold. Such submissions are considered on a case-by-case basis by the Commission. IWAK is fully aware of these provisions and has prepared a business case on which my Department has already begun engaging with the Commission. It will be up to the Commission to decide whether the 75% threshold can be exceeded in the case of IWAK. This process has only just begun and it is anticipated that it will take some time for the Commission to consider its position in the context of the 2014 EU Guidelines on State Aid to Airports and Airlines.

Cycling Facilities Provision

615. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures he proposes to improve safety for cyclists in Dublin city; his plans to ensure better segregation between cyclist and other road users; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39263/17]

616. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the poor condition of cycling infrastructure in the Dublin 15 area in particular, including the Royal Canal Way; his plans to remedy these problems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39264/17]

617. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the substandard cycling infrastructure in Dublin city; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39265/17]

618. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding allocated to cycling infrastructure in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39266/17]

619. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to introduce a free puncture repair scheme at the local cycle shops similar to the bike purchase scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39267/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 615 to 619, inclusive, together.

I am pleased that the numbers cycling have increased year on year, with the recent Census showing a 43% increase in the numbers cycling to work and I am aware of calls for increased funding for infrastructure. I believe that the time has come for a step change in the level of investment in cycling 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 within the context of future capital planning, I am working to increase investment in cycling infrastructure over a number of years, targeted primarily on investment in segregated routes in the Greater Dublin Area and the Regional Cities. This could have a transformative effect on active travel in our cities over the coming years.

Over recent years my Department has directly funded active travel measures (i.e. walking and cycling) throughout Ireland as part of overall expenditure under a number of programmes, including the Smarter Travel Areas, Active Travel Towns and the National Cycle Network pro-

grammes. While this broader investment in Sustainable Transport involves projects that benefit cycling, it is sometimes difficult to attribute the specific level of spend in a project or programme that relates to the cycling infrastructure component. Information in this regard is being compiled by my Department at present and will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

In light of the NTA's responsibilities for the administration of the Sustainable Transport Management Grants and Regional Cities Programmes, which both involve investment benefiting cyclists, I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply in relation to funding provided to cycling under those programmes. If the Deputy does not receive a full response within 10 working days please contact my private office.

Taxi Regulations

620. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding taxi national car tests, NCTs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39283/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including vehicle standards, roadworthiness and suitability of SPSVs, 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.

Public Transport Fares

621. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to include a teen rate for Irish Rail users; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39298/17]

622. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason a person aged under 18 years of age and older than 16 years of age must pay the full adult price despite being a student in second level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39299/17]

623. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the NTA's plans to consider rail prices in Kildare for 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39300/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 621 to 623, 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.

However, the Deputy should be aware that second level students can indeed avail of discounted student fares on Iarnród Éireann services and eligibility details are listed on the company's website: <http://www.irishrail.ie/fares-and-tickets/fares-info>.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response from the NTA within ten working days.

Questions - Written Answers
Sports Capital Programme

624. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of a sports capital programme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39303/17]

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 24th February and I can confirm that an application has been submitted by the organisation referred to by the Deputy. 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.

Driver Licensing Exchange Agreements

625. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to allow for a holder of a US driving licence to automatically avail of an Irish licence (details supplied); if there are protocols in place currently with regard to recognition of such licences; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39305/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Irish driver licensing law operates within a framework of EU law, which sets common standards of obtaining a licence for all Member States. As a consequence, all EU licences are mutually exchangeable.

In the case of non-EU jurisdictions we may reach bilateral agreements on the exchange of licences. These cannot be made simply on the basis that they are convenient. They are based on the appropriate authorities on each side conducting a detailed comparison of the two licensing regimes, 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 examined the possibility of an exchange relationship for US licences. However, as driver licensing within the US operates at state rather than federal level, there are 50 different systems, with sometimes widely varying standards. Not only would it be necessary to reach 50 separate agreements, but each agreement would have to take into account the exchange arrangements existing between that state and the other 49. The RSA concluded that this would not be feasible.

In the absence of an exchange relationship, we have no option but to ask people to go through the necessary steps to obtain an Irish licence.

I appreciate that this creates a burden in terms of time and cost for people who have, in many cases, a long record of safe driving. I believe that we can relieve the burden to a considerable extent.

The biggest difficulty, in both time and cost, is with the mandatory 12 Essential Driver Training (EDT) lessons. My Department is currently working on proposals from the RSA for a 'Short EDT' for drivers with full licences from non-exchange countries. It is my intention that this system will be in place from the beginning of 2018.

Driver Test Waiting Lists

626. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the long waiting times being experienced for practical driving tests in County Mayo; the reason for same; the efforts that are being made to rectify the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39342/17]

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.

National Transport Authority

627. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 256 of 4 May 2017, if he can ascertain from the National Transport Authority, if a company (details supplied) has been identified for the provision of bus shelters nationwide; if it has identified a suitable bespoke unit as suggested by the NTA to this Deputy on 16 May 2017 for John Street, Sligo; if this will be taking place in September 2017 as suggested; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39378/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the provision of bus shelters in the State and I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for an update on the issues raised. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Railway Stations Upgrade

628. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason only €4.8 million of the previously announced €16.8 million in funding for the redevelopment of Colbert station in Limerick has been allocated to date; and when the remaining €12 million will be allocated for the completion of the works. [39395/17]

629. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated completion dates of phase 2 and phase 3 of the redevelopment of Colbert train station in Limerick. [39396/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 628 and 629 together.

As the Deputy is aware, the National Transport Authority (NTA) administers the Regional Cities Programme for investment in public transport infrastructure in the regional cities, including Limerick.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in this area, I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Pension Provisions

630. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if

he will report on pension schemes within the CIÉ group of companies; if senior management in those companies are also members of those schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39413/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for CIÉ 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.

Road Traffic Offences Data

631. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of parked vehicles that are towed out of bus lanes daily. [39477/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I have no role as regards the actual removal of vehicles from bus lanes nor have I any statistics relating to same. The removal of parked vehicles from bus lanes is a matter for the relevant local authority and for An Garda Síochána.

Road Traffic Offences

632. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for further disincentives to stop drivers using bus lanes illegally; and the details of same. [39478/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): There are currently two fixed charge offences in relation to drivers using bus lanes; a driver who drives in a bus lane or a bus-only street attracts a fixed charge of €60, rising to €90 after 28 days, while a driver who parks illegally in a bus lane or on a bus-only street attracts a fixed charge of €40, rising to €60 after 28 days.

Enforcement of this, and all other, road traffic legislation is a matter for an Garda Síochána. Local Authority traffic wardens are also empowered to issue fixed charge notices for vehicles parked in a bus lane or on a bus-only street.

While I currently have no plans to amend the existing provisions dealing with the offences relating to parking in bus lanes, my Department keeps these, and all other fixed charge offences, under constant review.

Sports Capital Programme Administration

633. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when sports clubs will be informed whether they have been successful in the sports capital programme 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39510/17]

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 Depart-

ment. I expect to be in a position to make an announcement regarding allocations in the coming weeks.

Road Improvement Schemes

634. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the time-frame and commencement by stage of the upgrade of the interchange at the Jack Lynch tunnel, Cork. [39540/17]

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 (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy’s question to TII for direct reply. The Deputy might advise my private office if he does not receive a reply within ten working days.

Cycling Facilities Provision

635. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider extending the Dublin bikes scheme to St Vincent’s Hospital, Donnybrook and UCD; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39567/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA), in co-operation with the relevant local authority, is responsible for the administration and expansion of the public bikes scheme in the Dublin area.

In light of the NTA’s responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy’s question to the Authority for a direct response. The Deputy might advise my private office if he does not receive a reply within ten working days.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

636. **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. [39571/17]

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.

Waste Disposal

637. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the legal position under the Roads Acts regarding wheelie bins being deposited by waste collection companies on metered parking spaces in Dublin city after the company staff have taken them up from the collection point on the footpath and emptied them into the bin lorries; the person or body liable for the wheelie bins in this circumstance in the case of an accident, that is, the waste company or the person whose wheelie bin it is; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39666/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Wheelie bins are not covered under the Road Traffic Acts. This would be a matter for the local authorities.

Noise Pollution

638. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to ongoing complaints from residents of Clontarf, Dublin 3, about night time aircraft noise when the secondary 16/34 crosswind runway is used due to upgrading works on the main runway at Dublin airport; if he is satisfied that the attention of the Irish Aviation Authority has been drawn to its responsibilities under EU Regulation 598/2014 in respect of aircraft noise; if he will intervene to ensure that this noise nuisance is alleviated for local residents; if these aircraft flying at low altitude pose a danger for the householders affected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39671/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Firstly, I can advise that the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) is responsible for the State's Air Traffic Management (ATM) and the daa (Dublin Airport Authority) is responsible for the operation and management of Dublin airport. The direction of flight paths and the altitude of flights at Dublin airport is an operational matter for the IAA while the daa is responsible for the opening and closing of runways to facilitate runway repairs. Consequently, I shall forward the aspects of your question relating to these matters to the respective Authorities for direct reply. However, please advise my private office if a response is not received within ten working days.

On the issue of noise management at Dublin airport, I would like to clarify that Regulation 598/2014 establishes rules and procedures with regard to the introduction of noise-related operating restrictions at Union airports within, what is termed, the 'balanced approach' developed by the International Civil Aviation Organisation. Officials in my Department are currently working closely with the Office of the Attorney General determining the appropriate legislative arrangements to give full effect and implementation to the provisions of Regulation 598/2014 and to bring those legislative arrangements to completion urgently. These legislative arrangements will include designating a competent authority with responsibility for the management of aircraft noise at the airport.

Public Transport Subsidies

639. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost in terms of additional Government subvention to all modes of public transport, including buses, rail and trams, to enable a 50% reduction in all fares; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39679/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Under the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008 the regulation of Public Service Obligation (PSO) fares and subvention of PSO operators are matters for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. The Deputy might advise my private office if he does not receive a response within ten working days.

Sports Funding

640. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to establish a flood damage relief fund for sports clubs affected by the recent floods in north-east County Donegal as has been provided by the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine for farmers and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection for households; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39808/17]

641. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the supports he plans to provide for premises of a boxing club (details supplied) in view of the fact the premises has been significantly damaged by the recent floods in north-east County Donegal. [39809/17]

642. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the supports he plans to provide for a club (details supplied) whose premises and facilities have been significantly damaged by the recent floods in north-east County Donegal. [39810/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 640 to 642, inclusive, together.

My colleague the Minister of State at the Department of Defence, Mr. Paul Kehoe TD, has already announced a scheme to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to organisations (including sporting bodies) unable to secure flood insurance and affected by the recent flooding in Donegal.

Accordingly, in the first instance I would urge any sporting organisation affected by the floods to contact the Irish Red Cross who are administering the scheme.

If there are sporting clubs in the area impacted by the flooding but whose damage is deemed to be outside the terms of the Irish Red Cross scheme, they should contact the Sports Capital Unit of my Department. My Department has already received some such requests for funding which are currently under consideration.

I have personally visited a number of the clubs in question, in the company of Minister Joe McHugh, and I am aware of the challenges they face. I am eager to assist in any way I can.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

643. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 763 of 28 February 2017 and the application made by a sports club (details supplied), the timeframe for the announcement of the allocation. [39839/17]

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.

Child Care Services Funding

644. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if approval will be given for additional funding to expand on the public provision of suitable publicly provided and subsidised child care; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39053/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Having sought clarification I understand that the Deputy's question relates to funding for all aspects of Childcare, including the Community and Private childcare sectors.

My Department continues to invest significant resources in the early years sector. In Budget 2017 I secured a 35% increase in childcare funding, which was additional to a similar 35% increase in Budget 2016. These increases reflect the emphasis being placed on developing a quality service with appropriately supported staff.

On 11th April 2017 I made an announcement that the Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS) 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 up to €20 a week or €1,040 per year for children in full time childcare. The 'September measures' relate to the introduction of the Community Childcare Subvention Universal (CCSU) payment and the increase in band rates across the different strands of the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) Scheme and the Training and Employment Childcare (TEC) Scheme.

I also announced additional funding totalling €3.5 million for 'non-contact time'. This funding recognises the role played by childcare practitioners in supporting the administration of the measures that have commenced in September to lower the cost of childcare for families in Ireland. There is a commitment to pay this additional €3.5 million between September and the end of this year. This is on top of the payment currently available for drawdown by services on foot of Budget 2017, where €14.5 million was secured towards 'non-contact time'. The majority of services have now been paid an average of over €2,000 under this scheme.

I am also 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. 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 designed to create an additional 5,000 places.

Although my Department has been successful in securing additional funding for this sector over the past two budgets, as outlined above, I do acknowledge that much more must be done if we are truly to have affordable, accessible, quality childcare and continue to improve both the

affordability and quality of childcare. To this end I am currently engaged with my Government colleagues with a view to securing additional investment for the childcare sector in Budget 2018.

Community Childcare Subvention Programme

645. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount of funding that has been allocated by her Department to the childcare subvention scheme in 2016. [39126/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The allocation for the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme in 2016 was €61 million.

Affordable Childcare Scheme Expenditure

646. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount of funding that has been allocated to each band of the new affordable child care scheme for 2017; and the number of children included in each band. [39127/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I presume the Deputy is referring to the expanded community childcare scheme. Funding for childcare programmes is allocated by programme, not by band. To assist the Deputy in her query I am providing the estimated cost per band for full year delivery of the extended community childcare scheme (CCS).

It is estimated that the full-year cost of extending childcare subsidy rates for band A, band AJ and band B beneficiaries of the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme, in addition to a new band D being created in respect of children who are entitled to hold the over 6 GP Visit Card, and a new universal payment (for children who are between the ages of 6 months until the age they qualify for entry into the ECCE scheme), would be approximately €110 million.

Breakdown of the Estimated Cost Per Band	
Band A	€60 million
Band AJ	€12 million
Band B	€12 million
Band D	€6 million
Universal Subsidy	€20 million

Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

647. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount her Department has spent on external consultancy contracts to date in 2017. [39142/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The information requested is currently being collated. The information sought will be forwarded directly to the Deputy when available.

Departmental Expenditure

648. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount her Department has spent on photography to date in 2017. [39143/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department has spent €912.66 on photography to date in 2017.

Public Relations Contracts Expenditure

649. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount her Department has spent on public relations to date in 2017. [39144/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department has spent €10,617.10 on public relations to date in 2017.

Early Childhood Care and Education Funding

650. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will review a case (details supplied) and address the person's concerns; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39181/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The eligibility of the applying parent is determined by their status with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) and certain other factors including medical cards or GP visit cards (for children over 6 only). The amount of the subvention received from the DCYA is determined by the parent's DSP status and also by the level of childcare required. If a qualifying DEASP payment and a Medical card is received the system should automatically award the highest band due to a parent. This is based on the information supplied rather than who they relate to (Parent or Child).

It is unclear from the details supplied why the family is not receiving band A. They should send an email to eyqueries@dcya.gov.ie and this will be examined as a matter of priority.

Cúram agus Oideachas na Luath-Óige

651. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den an Aire Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige an bhfuil aon cheanglas ar sheirbhísí oideachais luathbhlianta atá ag glacadh páirt sa scéim um chúram agus oideachas luath-óige i limistéir ghaeltachta, ach nach bhfuil bainteach le CNNG, Gaeilge a bheith á teagasc acu; mura bhfuil, cén fáth nach bhfuil; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [39245/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Cé nach bhfuil aon cheanglais sna comhaontaithe deontas atá ann idir an Roinn Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige agus na soláthraithe cúram leanaí, nó i rialacha an chlár a bhaineann leo, aithníonn an Roinn Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige go bhfuil gá ann an méid a chothaigh sa Ghaeltacht maidir le tacaíocht don Ghaeilge in earnáil na luathbhlianta. Chun é seo a dhéanamh, beidh áiseanna oideachais agus oiliúna cuí ag teastáil ar son cleachtóirí agus seirbhísí, agus beidh forbairt ábhar agus acmhainní ag teastáil freisin.

Bhunaigh mé foghrúpa den Fhóram um Luathbhlianta, a bhfuil baill ann ó CNNG, Gaeloideachas, Foras na Gaeilge, na Naonraí Gaelacha, an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna, an Ro-

inn Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta, an tÚdarás, agus an Roinn Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige, chun tosaíochtaí a aithint le haghaidh an mhéid a chothaigh ina thaobh seo. Chuir an foghrúpa a thuarscáil ar fáil le déanaí, agus tá mo chuid oifigigh ag smaoineamh uirthi faoi láthair.

Oideachas Gaeltachta

652. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den an Aire Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige ós rud é go bhfuil 46% de réamhscoileanna ag feidhmiú trí Ghaeilge agus go bhfuil breis is 80% de bhunscoileanna ag lorg aitheantas mar scoileanna Gaeltachta, cén fáth nach bhfuil scéim aitheantais do réamhscoileanna ar fáil sa Ghaeltacht; an bhfuil a leithéid de scéim beartaithe ag a roinn; más rud é go bhfuil plean ann dá leithéid, cathain a chuirfear i bhfeidhm í; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [39246/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Cé go bhfuil mo chomhghleacaí an tAire Oideachais agus Scileanna ag tabhairt isteach scéim aitheantais ar son bunscoileanna mar chuid den chur i bhfeidhm dá bPolasaí Oideachas Gaeltachta, níl aon phleananna ann faoi láthair chun scéime cosúil le sin a thabhairt isteach le haghaidh seirbhísí réamhscolaíochta.

Aithníonn an Roinn Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige go bhfuil gá ann an méid a chothaigh sa Ghaeltacht maidir le tacaíocht don Ghaeilge in earnáil na luathbhlianta. Chun é seo a dhéanamh, beidh áiseanna oideachais agus oiliúna cuí ag teastáil ar son cleachtóirí agus seirbhísí, agus beidh forbairt ábhar agus acmhainní ag teastáil freisin.

Bhunaigh mé foghrúpa den Fhóram um Luathbhlianta, a bhfuil baill ann ó CNNG, Gaeloideachas, Foras na Gaeilge, na Naonraí Gaelacha, an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna, an Roinn Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta, an tÚdarás, agus an Roinn Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige, chun tosaíochtaí a aithint le haghaidh an mhéid a chothaigh ina thaobh seo. Chuir an foghrúpa a thuarscáil ar fáil le déanaí, agus tá mo chuid oifigigh ag smaoineamh uirthi faoi láthair.

Cúram agus Oideachas na Luath-Óige

653. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** den an Aire Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige cén to-radh a bhí ar an scéim phiolótach ar cuireadh tús léi i bhFómhar na bliana 2015 agus ina raibh cigirí luath-óige le cuairt a thabhairt ar sheirbhísí a ghlacann páirt sa scéim um chúram agus oideachas luath-óige chun measúnú a dhéanamh ar chaighdeán an tsoláthair oideachais; agus an ndéanfaidh sí ráiteas ina thaobh. [39247/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Thosaigh múnla nua de Chigireacht atá dírithe ar an Oideachas sna Luathbhlianta (EYEI) ar bhonn piolótach in 2015 i suíomhanna luathbhlianta. Tar éis na trialach seo, thugadh faoi phróiseas comhairliúcháin náisiúnta dírithe ar an gcreat meastóireachta agus ar na próisis cigireachta. I mí Aibreáin 2016, d'fhoilsigh an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna an creat agus na próisis cigireachta mar an múnla EYEI, agus thug an tAire Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige agus an tAire Oideachais agus Scileanna faomhadh chun iad a chur i bhfeidhm.

Thosaigh clár iomlán EYEI ar 14 April 2016. Go dtí seo, rinneadh cigireacht ar 20% (867) de na seirbhísí Luathbhlianta atá ag cur an chláir um Chúram agus Oideachas Luath-Óige (ECCE) ar fáil agus d'fhoilsigh breis agus 500 tuarascáil EYEI ar shuíomh idirlín na Roinne Oideachais agus Scileanna. I mí Bealtaine 2017, thosaigh athbhreithniú foirmiúil den mhúnla EYEI le seimineár poiblí chun na chéad torthaí agus taithí an EYEI a roinnt le eagraíochtaí de

na páirtithe leasmhara. Sheol suirbhé comhairliúcháin chun na deise a chur ar fáil do na seirbhísí luathbhlianta a rinneadh cigireacht orthu, agus do pháirtithe leasmhara níos leithne, aiseolas a thabhairt ar an múnla EYEI. Críochnóidh an próiseas comhairliúcháin ag deireadh mhí Mheán Fómhair 2017 agus ullmhóidh cigireacht na Roinne Oideachais agus Scileanna tuarascáil chun bonn eolais a chur faoin aithbhreithniú agus faoin bhforbairt den chigireacht atá dírithe ar an oideachas i seirbhísí luathbhlianta atá ag cur an chláir ECCE ar fáil.

Affordable Childcare Scheme

654. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the way in which women caring for children at home can receive a certificate to allow parents of the children to avail of the affordable child care scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39301/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): After seeking clarification I understand that the Deputy's query relates to the minimum number of children a childminder must care for in order to be eligible to avail of the more Affordable Childcare Scheme.

To this end, I have established a working group in order to make short, medium and long-term recommendations on reforms for the childminding sector. The working group is chaired by Childminding Ireland and includes officials from Tusla and DCYA.

The working group's recommendations will relate to childminders who are currently exempt from registration with Tusla (i.e. those minding three or fewer pre-school children, or those minding school-age children only). The working group will only be making recommendations in relation to home-based childminders involved in non-relative care. It is my understanding that the Group is finalising its recommendations at present. Once submitted, the report will be considered and a determination made in relation to the next steps taken.

Child Care Services

655. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will provide an update on her engagement with a group (details supplied) in regard to a care facility in County Cork; her plans to meet the group; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39438/17]

665. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will be an advocate to ensure three-way communication between Tusla, representatives of a community and an organisation (details supplied) when a location is being selected. [39566/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 655 and 665 together.

I am aware that concerns have been raised by the local community regarding a proposed Children's Residential Centre. However, as this is an operational matter, it is not appropriate for me, as Minister, to intervene.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has informed officials in my Department that direct engagement with representatives of a local residents' group has occurred, with a meeting held last Friday 15th September. This presented an opportunity for representatives of the local community to re-state their concerns, obtain clarifications and hear from Tusla about the registra-

tion, monitoring and context under which children's centres operate.

Community Childcare Subvention Programme

656. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of households that are currently part of band A, band AJ and band B of the community child care subvention scheme. [39457/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The detailed information sought by the Deputy is not currently available as registration of children for the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) programme only began on September 18th and will continue until the 13th of October 2017. Community Childcare Subvention Plus (CCSP) child registrations commenced in late August and are continuing. In the 2017/18 programme year the bands and eligibility have changed with children who would have qualified for band B in 2016-17 now being split between band B and a new band, band D.

While the number of households is not readily available, the below figures refer to the number of unique children who availed of CCS and CCSP under band A, band AJ and band B in the 2016/17 programme year:

Band	
Band A	14,121
Band AJ	4,459
Band B	8,452

In addition, 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. An estimated 33,000 children may avail of the universal element of the CCS scheme.

Community Childcare Subvention Programme

657. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the maximum income thresholds for band A, band AJ and band B of the community child care subvention scheme. [39458/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The eligibility of the applying parent is determined in the main by their status with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and whether they hold a medical card. As such, maximum income thresholds do not apply. In the 2017-18 programme year the bands and eligibility have changed with children who would have qualified for band B in 2016/17 now being split between band B and a new band, band D. The eligibility criteria and subsequent childcare and subvention options are set out in the accompanying Table.

Charitable and Voluntary Organisations

658. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if an organisation (details supplied) is a registered charity; and if she is satisfied that this organisation is fit for purpose. [39522/17]

664. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if an organisation (details supplied) is a registered organisation with charitable status. [39564/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 658 and 664 together.

It is my understanding that this question relates to a new Children’s Residential Centre, about which concerns have been raised by the local community. The centre in question is operated by a private company, which has registered with Tusla in the appropriate manner. 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.

The Foundation in question does not operate any Children’s Residential Centres and Tusla has no contract with it to do so. If the Deputies have a concern about the status of any charity, I suggest that they contact The Charities Regulatory Authority (CRA), Ireland’s national statutory regulatory agency for charitable organisations.

HSE Investigations

659. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will provide a report on a recent incident (details supplied). [39559/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I appreciate the distress involved in the situation referred to by the Deputy; however, it is not appropriate for me to comment on an individual case. However, I can inform the Deputy that the case has been referred to the National Review Panel for independent review and the Health Information and Quality Authority has been advised as per established guidance.

Child and Family Agency

660. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the funding provided by her Department to an organisation (details supplied), by county, in each of the past three years and to date in 2017. [39560/17]

661. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the contents of the mission statement, as agreed with an organisation (details supplied). [39561/17]

662. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the operational detail of a daily programme within a specific unit (details supplied). [39562/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 660 to 662, inclusive, together.

I have referred these questions to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, for direct response to the Deputy concerned.

Child Care Services

663. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the agreed location selection criteria for a specific unit (details supplied). [39563/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As this is an operational matter, I have asked Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, to respond directly to the Deputy with the most up-to-date information.

Question No. 664 answered with Question No. 658.

Question No. 665 answered with Question No. 655.

Child Care Services Provision

666. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if progress has been made in efforts to reopen a child care facility (details supplied) in County Longford; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39634/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy is aware, my Department does not directly provide childcare - rather we fund the provision of childcare through individuals, companies and community/not-for-profit groups. Therefore, following the closure of the existing childcare provider in this location, I requested that Pobal and Longford CCC work with local bodies and potential partners in relation to the re-establishment of a service for the local community. I also made once-off funding available in this respect.

Unfortunately, my Department has yet to receive a viable proposal for the creation of a childcare service in this area. Pobal and Longford CCC are therefore still pursuing options locally in this regard. Once-off funding remains in place, and I am open to receiving proposals from local/community groups who may be in a position to assist.

Child and Family Agency Funding

667. **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); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39661/17]

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 organisations. 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.

As previously highlighted to the Deputy, 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

668. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of visits made to family resource centres since 2007, by year. [39818/17]

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.

Family Resource Centres

669. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount of funding her Department has provided to family resource centres since 2013, by year. [39819/17]

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 following table sets out the level of funding provided to Family Resource Centres in the period 2013-2017.

Family Support Agency/ Tusla Funding to Family Resource Centres 2013-2017

Years	Tusla Funding provided to Family Resource Centres- (€m)
2013	14.31
2014	13.51
2015	13.09
2016	13.5
2017	13.512

Source: Family Support Agency (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.

Charities Regulation

670. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if his attention has been drawn to the impending sale of a building (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39191/17]

671. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if he will discuss with the Charities Regulator the legitimate concerns of the public in Newbridge relating to the sale of a building (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39193/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 670 and 671 together.

Pursuant to the Charities Act 2009 the Charities Regulator is required to be independent in the performance of its functions. It is the policy of the Charities Regulator not to comment to third parties in relation to specific applications for registration or any pre-investigation work because to divulge information to a third party could prejudice a future decision. In the circumstances it would not be appropriate for me nor my officials to enter into any discussions with the Regulator as sought by the Deputy. I am advised that the entity selling this building is not currently a registered charity and as such matters relating to the sale of the hall rest with the trustees.

If the Deputy has concerns that a charitable organisation is in breach of the Charities Act 2009, I suggest that such concerns should be brought to the attention of the Charities Regulator. All concerns received by the Charities Regulator are actively reviewed.

Library Services Funding

672. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if a new funding mechanism for the upgrading of libraries will be made available by his Department in order that libraries such as Sligo Central Library in Sligo town can develop new premises to better cater to the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39210/17]

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 €20m under the Libraries Capital Investment Programme 2016-2021 to support 17 priority capital projects submitted by local authorities. Funding under the programme is currently fully allocated; however, my Department has sought additional funding for the programme under the Government's mid-term capital expenditure review.

Sligo County Council has been advised that the development of Sligo Central Library and all other proposals on hand for funding will be reconsidered should additional capital monies become available.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

673. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to roll out the scheme to renovate properties and old buildings in small towns and villages from its present pilot status to a nationwide programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39086/17]

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. I intend to announce the successful applicants shortly.

My officials have separately been examining the potential for developing a pilot scheme to encourage residential occupancy in rural towns and villages. The pilot is not yet in operation. This 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 and details of the scheme will be announced when they are finalised.

CLÁR Programme

674. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when groups should expect to hear from the Department regarding the second-round decisions on CLÁR funding and on whether they have been successful; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39289/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The 2017 CLÁR programme was launched on 31 March 2017 to provide funding for small scale infrastructural projects in disadvantaged rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population. Funding under the programme was available this year under four separate Measures:

Measure	-
Measure 1:	Support for School and Community Safety Measures
Measure 2:	Play areas
Measure 3:	Targeted Community Infrastructure
Measure 4:	First Responder Supports

The closing date for applications under the programme was 5 May 2017 and over 500 applications were received across the four Measures.

Successful projects were announced in May and June, with a total of just under €7 million allocated to approximately 230 projects across the four Measures. Details of the approved projects are available on my Department's website at <http://drcd.gov.ie/subheader1/clar>.

There are currently no plans to revisit existing applications under the 2017 scheme or to open the CLÁR programme for new applications again this year. The provision of funding for the CLÁR programme for 2018 will be considered as part of the annual Estimates process.

CLÁR Programme

675. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if his Department will provide supplementary funding under the CLÁR programme for essential works in a facility (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [39380/17]

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 2017. The programme provides funding for small scale infrastructural projects in disadvantaged rural areas that have experienced significant levels of de-population.

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

Measure	
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, with a combined value of €15 million.

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. Approximately 230 applications were approved in May and June for funding totalling €7 million.

I can confirm that an application was received under the programme from the project referred to by the Deputy. However, insufficient documentary evidence was provided in support of the application, as required by the scheme criteria, and the application was unsuccessful as a result.

There are currently no plans to revisit existing applications under the 2017 scheme or to open the CLÁR programme for new applications again this year. The provision of funding for the CLÁR programme for 2018 will be considered as part of the annual Estimates process later this year.

Post Office Network

676. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if his attention has been drawn to a matter (details supplied) that could impact on the survival of rural post offices; his plans to address this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39673/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): This matter is not within my remit. The organisation referred to by the Deputy is a statutory body under the remit of the Minister for Education and Skills.

The Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment is responsible for policy matters related to An Post.

Rural Development Programme Funding

677. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount of the €28 million paid to local authorities under the regional and rural sub-heads in 2016 that was allocated for County Wexford; the amount that has been spent by Wexford

County Council submitted to his Department accounting for this expenditure to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39726/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Table 1 provides details of the amounts of funding provided to Wexford Co. Council in 2016 in respect of Rural Development Programmes which at that stage were under the remit of the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The table also shows the amount of funding expended under each of these programmes up to 31 August 2017.

All funding provided to Local Authorities under these programmes in 2016 was in line with the sanctions received from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and on the basis of funding agreements with the Local Authorities.

Responsibility for the administration of the programmes in question has transferred to the Department of Rural and Community Development. My Department is continuing to work closely with all relevant Local Authorities to ensure that any remaining funding allocated to them is spent promptly and in accordance with the original project proposals.

Table 1 – Allocation to Wexford Co. Council in 2016 under national Rural Development Programmes

Programme/Scheme	2016 Allocation	Amount spent as of 31st August 2017
Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ)	€100,000	€15,325
Town & Village Renewal	€380,000	€300,114
Rural Recreation	€189,455	€82,740
Totals	€669,455	€398,179

Roads Maintenance Funding

678. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if his Department has received an application for funding to upgrade a road (details supplied); the scheme under which this application is being considered; the progress made to date in considering the application; when it is expected that a decision will be made in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39845/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department does not currently operate a scheme for road upgrades. However, I am 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. Decisions in relation to the selection of individual roads in any such scheme are a matter for each Local Authority.

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. The information provided by the Local Authorities is now being considered and a decision in relation to any potential scheme will be made shortly.

Social Welfare Rates

679. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to increase welfare payment rates by a higher percentage than the projected price increases in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39051/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Programme for Government commits to increasing the State pension and the living alone allowance above the rate of inflation. It also supports increases in payments to people with disabilities and carers.

Budget 2017 provided for a €5 increase in the maximum rates of payment across all weekly schemes, with proportionate increases for qualified adults and those on reduced rates of payment. For pensioners, this was the equivalent of a 2.1% increase. For most working age recipients, this was the equivalent of a 2.65% increase.

The Department of Finance's *Summer Economic Statement* reports a Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP) inflation rate of 0.6% for 2017 and forecasts HICP inflation of 1.2% for 2018, resulting in a cumulative inflation rate of 1.8%. Accordingly, the Programme for Government commitment has been met in respect of increases to the weekly rates of payment.

The appropriate levels of weekly rates of payment for 2018 will be considered by Government in the context of the resources available in the forthcoming Budget.

Employment Rights

680. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if it is legal for an employer and employee to agree that the employee will take payment in lieu of part of their holidays; if a company or its director are breaking labour law in cases (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39711/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Following the coming into effect of the *Labour Affairs and Labour Law (Transfer of Departmental Administration and Ministerial Functions) Order 2017* (S. I. No. 361 of 2017) on the 1st of September, responsibility for employment rights policy and legislation transferred from the Minister of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation to myself as Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection. 11 pieces of primary legislation governing employment rights in Ireland are now within my remit including the *Organisation of Working Time Act 1997* (OWT Act).

Under the annual leave provisions of the OWT Act, the minimum statutory annual leave entitlement of four weeks' annual leave must be given on a paid leave basis. In addition, payment in lieu cannot be substituted for the taking of the minimum leave entitlement unless the employee is leaving the employment. This has been confirmed by the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in several cases taken under the EU Working Time Directive. However, provisions in relation to any annual leave entitlement over and above the statutory minimum entitlement can be negotiated between an employer and an employee.

It appears that the Deputy's question may relate to the taking of annual leave by a director of a company. In this case, the applicability of the annual leave provisions of the OWT Act to a company director will depend on whether or not the director would be regarded as an employee of the company as defined in Section 2 of the OWT Act. If, in the particular circumstances of the case, the director is deemed to be an employee within the meaning of the Act, then the provisions of the OWT Act would apply.

The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) is mandated to secure compliance with em-

ployment rights legislation. Where an individual believes they are being deprived of employment rights applicable to employees, they may refer a complaint to the 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.

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.

Disability Allowance Payments

681. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her Department is responsible for ensuring that disability allowance is paid to the person for whom it is intended (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39058/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The circumstances in which a customer is deemed to be unable to manage his or her own financial affairs may include one or more of the following:

- an inability to understand the basis of possible entitlements to benefit;
- an inability to understand and complete the claim form;
- an inability to understand and deal with correspondence and enquiries concerning the claim;
- an inability to manage benefit payments received.

In this type of situation, a formal application must be made on behalf of the customer and documentary evidence provided. The customer must be certified by a registered medical practitioner to be a person who is unable for the time being to manage their own financial affairs.

The agent appointed may or may not be a relative of the customer. Once appointed, they have a duty to act in the best interests of the customer. Amongst their duties are the responsibility to:

- receive and deal with any sum payable by way of benefit on behalf of the customer;
- make payments only on items or services which are of benefit to the customer;
- ensure the balance of any benefit is lodged to an interest bearing account for the benefit of the customer;
- keep a record of all sums received by way of benefit which have been lodged to an interest bearing account on behalf of the customer;
- keep a record of all other transactions made in relation to sums received by way of benefit on behalf of the customer;
- produce these records when requested to do so by the customer or by their nearest relative or by an officer of the Department;
- notify the department of any changes in the customer's circumstances.

Should any issue or question arise in respect of an appointed person, the Department will take the necessary actions, consulting or involving as appropriate other relevant agencies such as the Health Service Executive or An Garda Síochána.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Household Benefits Scheme

682. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the method used to calculate the annual payment of over €50 million to RTE for the free television licence; if it assumed that each person in receipt of a social welfare payment eligible for the scheme has a television without checks; and the reason the figures provided in the recent reply received by this Deputy on this issue as the annual amounts are remarkably similar and are not divisible by the television licence fee. [39124/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The household benefits package (HHB) comprises the electricity or gas allowance, and the free television licence. Customers receive their free licence directly from my Department upon qualifying for the household benefits package and their entitlement remains valid for as long as they continue to receive that package. There are 429,463 customers in receipt of the free television licence as of July 2017.

My Department pays a fixed amount of €4,432,046 to the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment (DCCA) on a monthly basis. In addition to paying the DCCA, this fund is also used for the payment of TV Licence refunds to customers. Eligibility for a refund on a licence already purchased is based on the approved date of the Household Benefits Package.

In 2011, expenditure for the TV licence scheme was capped at 2010 levels and was subsequently cut by €5 million in the 2014 Budget. Prior to the cap and the cut to funding payments were made to DCCA on a monthly basis using an agreed formula based on a percentage of the Department's customer base. This formula took into account the savings to RTE and An Post on costs of administration, enforcement and collection of the licence fees for this cohort of customers. In Budget 2017 an additional €1 million was made available to increase the payment made to DCCA.

My Department is currently reviewing the funding levels along with the DCCA. Any decision to increase the payment will have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Money Advice and Budgeting Service

683. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the actions she has taken on foot on the motion opposing the restructuring of MABS and CIS being passed by Dáil Éireann and a report from the Joint Committee on Social Protection which also called for the restructuring process to be halted; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39130/17]

686. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the restructuring process of MABS and CIS can be halted until such a time as there is

agreement between relevant stakeholders on a way forward that is agreeable with all sides concerned; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39133/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 683 and 686 together.

As the Deputy is aware, the Citizens Information Board (CIB), which has statutory responsibility for the Citizens Information Services (CIS) and the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS), decided on 15th February 2017 to restructure its governance arrangements to a regional model, comprising eight CIS and 8 MABS companies.

As a statutory body, the Board has the sole right to make decisions on its day to day operations as it sees fit. The considered advice received from the Office of the Attorney General is that, as Minister, I do not have the power to seek to intervene in such a decision taken by the Board, or to direct the Board not to implement its decision.

CIB has not taken this operational decision lightly. It follows years of analysis of options and detailed consultation with all stakeholders on the need for a more streamlined governance model. It is important to note that the new arrangements are being implemented at local company board level only. The valuable work carried out by the employees and volunteers working in CIS services and the employees of MABS services will continue as before.

In May of this year, 300 representatives of staff, management, and volunteers, as well as Chairpersons and representatives of local CIS and MABS services attended regional consultations organised by CIB. Over the summer months, 238 people attended 8 Focus Groups at which service delivery strategy, board structures, linkages and staff roles under the new company model were discussed. CIB plans to hold a further Focus Group on Volunteers in October.

CIB is seeking to implement the Board's decision in a consultative way and is making genuine efforts to allay any concerns of staff and boards of local services in relation to the operation of the new sixteen company structure.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Money Advice and Budgeting Service

684. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the cost-benefit analysis of the MABS and CIS restructuring process has been completed; if completed, the findings of this analysis; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39131/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy is aware, the Citizens Information Board (CIB) has statutory responsibility for the Citizens Information Service (CIS) and Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS).

A full Cost Benefit Analysis on the new sixteen regional board model has been commissioned by CIB and is due for submission to the Board of CIB in September.

As highlighted previously, cost savings is not the driver of the change to reduce the number of service delivery companies from ninety three to sixteen. The aim of the change is to improve existing governance arrangements and optimise the benefits from operating a more modern and streamlined citizen focused delivery model. Where efficiencies may occur from the changes, resources will be redirected towards improving the range and in some cases the consistency of

quality of service provision to those who use CIS and MABS services countrywide.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Money Advice and Budgeting Service

685. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she has formally met with representatives of MABS and CIS who are opposed to the restructuring of their organisations; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39132/17]

689. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to meet with representatives of the MABS national management forum to discuss the proposals to regionalise the MABS and CIS; if she will issue a directive and abandon these proposals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39170/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 685 and 689 together.

In February 2017, the Board of Citizens Information Board decided to restructure its governance arrangements to a regional model comprising sixteen companies, 8 Citizens Information Services (CIS) and 8 Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) companies.

The aim of the change is to improve the effectiveness of the control environment, financial management, and governance of CIS and MABS service networks and service delivery standards and consistency.

CIB took this operational decision following five years of analysis and consideration of options and extensive consultation with all stakeholders. As a statutory body, the Board of CIB has the sole right to make decisions on its day to day operations as it sees fit.

The considered advice received from the Office of the Attorney General is that I, as Minister, do not have the power to seek to intervene in such a decision taken by the Board, or to direct the Board not to implement its decision.

Given the advice received, any suggestions regarding proposals for alternative governance models are properly a matter for the Board of CIB. Accordingly, it is proper for the representative groups to engage with the Chair of the Board on such matters.

Since the Board’s decision, CIB has held regional consultations with representatives of the CIS and MABS networks. In May, 300 representatives of staff, management, and volunteers, as well as Chairpersons and representatives of local CIS and MABS services attended these sessions. Over the summer, 238 people attended 8 Focus Groups hosted by CIB, at which service delivery strategy, board structures, linkages and staff roles under the new sixteen company model were discussed. CIB plans to hold a further Focus Group on Volunteers in October.

It is evident that CIB is seeking to implement the Board’s decision in a consultative way and is making genuine efforts to allay any concerns of staff and boards of local services in relation to the operation of the new sixteen company structure.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputies.

Question No. 686 answered with Question No. 683.

Mortgage Interest Supplement Scheme Applications

687. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a mortgage interest supplement payment will be made to a person (details supplied); if their file has been retrieved from the archives; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39156/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The persons concerned claim for Mortgage Interest Supplement was disallowed on 18/7/12 as they had not entered into and complied with an alternative repayment arrangement with their mortgage provider for a period of 12 months prior to their claim (Section 198 of The Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, Subsections 5AA, 5AB and 5AC). The person concerned was advised at the time to contact their mortgage provider to discuss repayment options. The person concerned was also advised in July 2012 that they may reapply for Mortgage Interest Supplement after they had availed of an alternative arrangement with their mortgage lender for a total period of 12 months.

The person's concerned file has been retrieved from archives and it has been confirmed that no further application for Mortgage Interest Supplement was received from the person concerned by the Central Rents Unit since July 2012 when their claim was disallowed.

From 1st January 2014 the Mortgage Interest Supplement Scheme was closed to new entrants and no new applications will be accepted from this date.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

688. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a social welfare appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39167/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that there is no record of any appeal by the person concerned having been received by that office.

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. 689 answered with Question No. 685.

Household Benefits Scheme

690. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the cost of the free TV licence scheme over the past ten years; and the number of persons who were covered by the scheme for each of those years. [39184/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The household benefits package (HHB) comprises the electricity or gas allowance, and the free

television licence.

Prior to the capping of expenditure at 2010 levels and the subsequent cut of €5 million in the 2014 Budget for the Free TV licence scheme, payments were made to the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, (DCCAÉ) for the Free TV licence scheme on a monthly basis using an agreed formula based on a percentage of the Department's customer base. In Budget 2017 an additional €1 million was made available to increase the payment made to DCCAÉ.

There are 429,463 customers in receipt of the free television licence as of July 2017. The amounts paid and customers in receipt of the license each year from 2008 to date are

Year	Customers	€
2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 (July) 2017	372, 152381, 142394, 030404 ,619408, 626413, 214407, 824419, 209424, 492 (July) 429,463	53,700, 92555, 703, 65457, 184, 56557, 184,56057, 184,56057, 184,56052, 184,55652, 184,55652, 184,556 (July) *31,024,324

* This figure is the amount paid by my Department to the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment as of July 2017 (€4,432,046 per month, projected expenditure for 2017 is €53,184,552).

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance Scheme Eligibility

691. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to amend the criteria for the back to school clothing and footwear allowance in order to allow low-income families that do not claim a social welfare payment to avail of the scheme (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39189/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The back to school clothing and footwear allowance (BSCFA) 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 which operates from June to September.

In order to qualify for the allowance claimants must be in receipt of a qualifying payment. There is a broad range of qualifying payments which include:

- Weekly social welfare payments,
- Approved employment schemes,
- Recognised education or training courses such as Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) or Back To Education Allowance
- Further Education and Training Courses (formerly Fás), Fáilte Ireland or LES training scheme

In-work income supports for low-income working families, including family income supplement and the back to work family dividend are qualifying payments for BSCFA and income under these schemes is not included in the means assessment for BSCFA.

There are no current plans to amend the eligibility criteria for BSCFA. Any changes to the

scheme would have to be considered in a budgetary context and within the scope of the overall resources available for welfare improvements.

I would suggest that the family referred to by the Deputy should contact the Department to ensure that it is in receipt of all possible social welfare schemes to which it may have an entitlement.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

692. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made regarding an appeal which has been submitted on behalf of a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay in assigning this file to an appeals officer despite it being in the urgent cases since 26 July 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39190/17]

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 partially 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 Chief Appeals Officer has assured me that appeals are dealt with as quickly as possible having regard to the volume of appeals on hand and the overall workload of the appeals office.

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 trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Staff

693. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason staff at the pensions office in County Sligo are not using the car park facilities provided on site (details supplied); if efforts can be made from within her Department to address this situation going forward; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39206/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department was not aware that there was an issue with its staff not using the on site parking facilities provided at its office at College Road, Sligo. On foot of the concerns expressed by the Deputy, a notice has issued to all staff members highlighting the issue.

The Department will continue to monitor the situation over the coming weeks.

Carer's Allowance Applications

694. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the grounds upon which an application for carer's allowance was unsuccessful in view of the information submitted in the case of a person (details supplied); when an appeal will be determined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39251/17]

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 29 March 2017. Carer's Allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment, made to persons who are providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that although a certain level of care was being provided the level involved did not amount to full-time care.

The person concerned was notified on 28 July 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

The Department was notified on 14 August 2017 that the person concerned had appealed this decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). A submission in support of the decision is being prepared and will shortly be forwarded along with the file to the SWAO for determination.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Employment Support Services

695. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the highest level of training on the NFQ that a person can participate in while partaking in a CE scheme as part of their CE scheme training. [39304/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): During their time on Community Employment (CE) participants are encouraged and supported to work towards a major award/industry recognised standard of achievement to support progression to employment and further training and education. Participant training leading to an award on the National Framework of Qualification (NFQ) includes awards at QQI Level 3, 4, 5 or 6 or industry recognised equivalent. The award level must be appropriate to the individual's ability, prior education history and progression goals.

A participant training grant is allocated to each Community Employment Scheme. Training is based on the personal and occupational needs of each individual and is identified through the tailored Individual Learning Plan (ILP), agreed between the CE Supervisor with the participant. The ILP tracks, records and reports on all planned training interventions and achievements in line with the participant's career plan and employment goals.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Back to Education Allowance Eligibility

696. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to recent changes to the back to education allowance (details supplied), if her attention has been drawn to the difficulties these changes pose particularly for persons that work at weekends and receive premium rates; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39312/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) is designed primarily to support second chance educa-

tion. It is an educational opportunities scheme for persons in receipt of certain qualifying social welfare payments wishing to pursue second or third level courses of education in order to improve their employment prospects.

Entitlement to BTEA is conditional on having on-going entitlement to the qualifying scheme payment. The BTEA scheme has been amended in recent years to ensure that the conditions are in line with the qualifying payment. BTEA participants with eligibility based on jobseekers, transitional jobseeker's or one parent family payments who engage in part-time work will be assessed in accordance with their primary payment. This measure ensures that only participants who continue to satisfy the means test of their primary payment or another qualifying BTEA payment will continue to receive income support under BTEA and that resources are directed at those most in need of assistance.

The BTEA was never intended to be an alternative form of funding for people entering or re-entering the third level education system. The student universal support Ireland (SUSI) grant payable by the Department of Education and Skills represents the primary support for persons pursuing education.

A new €500 annual Cost of Education Allowance will be made available to Back to Education Allowance participants with children from the next academic year in September. This will help parents, including lone parents, to return to education. Additionally the age related payments will no longer apply to participants of the BTEA, as a result students who have a reduced payment on their primary scheme payment will now benefit from the maximum rate of payment from the new academic year.

Overall, the priority for my Department is that the BTEA scheme will be focused, targeted and suitable for the needs of jobseekers and of the future skills needs of the economy. It is only in that context that changes to BTEA will be considered. I have no plans to change the current rules for the Allowance.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

697. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an application will be processed for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39370/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The lady referred to has been awarded an invalidity pension with effect from the 02 March 2017. Payment will issue to her nominated bank account on the 28 September 2017. Any arrears due from 02 March 2017 to 27 September 2017 (less any overlapping social welfare payment and/or outstanding overpayment) will issue in due course. The lady in question was notified of this decision on the 11 September 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 698 withdrawn.

Social Welfare Appeals

699. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection

when an application will be processed for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39405/17]

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 25 July 2016. 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 14 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.

Public Services Card Availability

700. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which an Irish citizen in receipt of a State pension but living abroad can apply for a public services card if they do not have an address here. [39425/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): A Public Services Card may be issued to an individual who has successfully authenticated their identity to SAFE Level 2 (substantial level of assurance). Roll-out of the SAFE registration programme commenced in 2011 and initial concentration has been on individuals who are resident in Ireland or otherwise have a requirement for SAFE registration (e.g. residents of Northern Ireland who require a PPSN for purposes of employment in Ireland).

Face-to-face SAFE 2 registration, which involves the capture of an individual's photograph and signature and the verification of identity data already held by the Department, is taking place countrywide in 100 offices of the Department. Online self-scheduling via www.mywelfare.ie is available and walk-ins are also welcome.

The Department is not requesting people living abroad and in receipt of a State Pension to be registered to SAFE level 2 or to have a Public Services Card in this phase of the roll-out programme. Accordingly, the current methods of undertaking SAFE Level 2 registration do not facilitate such individuals while they are abroad. The general issue of facilitating non-residents will be dealt with in later phases of the roll-out programme in conjunction with other Departments/Offices with similar requirements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

701. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will issue to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39437/17]

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.

To qualify for IP a claimant must satisfy a number of conditions, including the condition that they have at least 260 (5 years) paid PRSI contributions since entering social insurance and have at least 48 paid or credited social insurance contributions in the last complete contribution year before the date of their claim. Only PRSI classes A, E or H contributions are reckonable for the purpose of these conditions.

The Department received an application for IP for the lady concerned on the 29 June 2017. In order to confirm her social insurance record, her case has been sent to a social welfare inspector (SWI) for investigation. Upon completion of the SWI's investigation, her application will be processed and a Deciding Officer will be in direct contact with the lady regarding the outcome of her application.

In the meantime, disability allowance remains in payment to the lady in question at a reduced rate, based on her means.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance

702. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding applying for disability allowance while on jobseeker's allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39445/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Where a person applies for disability allowance while in receipt of jobseeker's allowance, the jobseeker's allowance payment continues pending the result of the disability allowance claim.

Where the person's application for disability allowance has not been successful jobseeker's allowance may continue to be paid subject to all the conditions of the scheme being satisfied including the requirement to be capable of work, available for full-time work and genuinely seeking employment.

Public Services Card

703. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the legal framework under which is it deemed mandatory for a person to respond to invitations being sent by her Department to discuss the issuing of new public services cards; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39467/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): There is no legal framework under which is it deemed mandatory for a person to respond to invitations being sent by the Department to discuss the issuing of Public Services Cards. Where the Department may issue such an invitation, it is entirely a matter for the invitee to accept that invitation or otherwise.

Separately, 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 sched-

uled 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.

While the default SAFE 2 registration method is 'face-to-face' (as set out at Sections 263B, 241 and 247C (3) of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, as amended), the Department can and does make other arrangements with certain customers, where appropriate, to elevate their identity verification to the SAFE 2 standard. Combining high quality public service identity data with risk analysis and customer consent can, in some circumstances, allow the Department to complete the process by post rather than face-to-face. These alternative methods are 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. 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.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

704. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied) for invalidity pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39472/17]

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 13 September 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 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 Eligibility

705. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) qualifies for carer's or part carer's allowance in respect of their child; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39498/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment, made to persons who are providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care. If a person is in receipt of another social welfare payment in their own right (other than unemployment payments or supplementary welfare allowance) or being claimed as a qualified adult on their spouse/partner's payment, a half-rate carer's allowance can be paid too as long as all the normal conditions for receipt of CA are satisfied.

These conditions require that the applicant is habitually resident in the State, must be providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require full-time care and attention and their means must be below the statutory limit.

The person concerned is in a receipt of a widow's contributory pension. If she satisfies the qualifying conditions, CA would be paid at half-rate.

Accordingly, an application form (CR1) has been issued, which the person concerned should complete and return as soon as possible, in order that their entitlement to CA may be determined.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Eligibility

706. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if provision can be made for persons (details supplied) to receive separate disability assistance payments or invalidity pensions as opposed to an adult dependency payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39502/17]

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 man on 27 June 2017. On 6 September 2017 the person concerned was requested to supply supporting documentation required by the deciding officer in order to make a decision on his 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.

Social Welfare Overpayments

707. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in respect of the determination of an appeal following an oral hearing in the case of a person (details supplied) concerning an alleged overpayment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39511/17]

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 2 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 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

708. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 389 of 15 November 2016, the timeframe for proposals to be made available; if entitlement to a mixed insurance pro rata pension will still be an option for persons that have employment both in the public and private sectors; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39532/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): To qualify for a state pension (contributory) a person must have at least 520 paid contributions and satisfy a yearly average condition (a yearly average of 48 contributions paid or credited is required for a full rate State pension (contributory), and reduced rates of payment may be payable for pensioners with lower averages). Once over 16 years of age, the date a person enters into insurable employment is the date used for averaging purposes.

The National Pensions Framework (2010) proposed that a “Total Contributions Approach” (TCA) should replace the yearly average approach, for new pensioners from 2020. The aim of this approach is to make the rate of contributory pension more closely match contributions made by a person. Officials of my Department are currently working on the detailed development of the TCA with a view to making proposals for consideration later in the year. This is a very significant reform with considerable legal, administrative, and technical elements in its implementation. Following completion of the Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund later this year, a refined proposal will be developed.

My Department will then conduct a period of consultation with relevant stakeholders including interest groups, representative bodies and the Oireachtas. Following the consultation period, I will submit a proposal to Government seeking approval of the new approach, which in turn will require legislation to be passed by the Oireachtas.

There is no single Pro Rata Contributory Pension. However there are arrangements which operate on such a basis. A mixed insurance pro-rata State pension is one of a number of alternative qualifying methods introduced to ensure that as many people as possible qualify for a State pension contributory. This was introduced in 1991 and was designed to ensure that people who have contributed to the social insurance system at different rates receive a pension which reflects the proportion of full rate contributions which exists in their overall insurance record.

This pension is calculated by taking the total number of contributions (modified and full rate) a person has paid over their working life and applying the average contributions test to arrive at the rate which would be paid if all contributions were at the full rate. The actual rate to be paid is determined by the proportion of full rate contributions in the overall record. There are also pro-rata arrangements which may apply when calculating pensions due under international social security agreements. The requirements to qualify for such pensions may depend upon the circumstances of the person and their insurance record in Ireland and abroad.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Family Income Supplement Applications

709. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application for FIS can be reviewed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39544/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Family Income Supplement (FIS) is a weekly tax-free payment available to employees with one or more qualified children. The scheme provides additional financial support to employees

on low pay. One of the conditions for receipt of FIS is that an applicant or the applicant and spouse, partner or cohabitant must be engaged in full-time remunerative employment as an employee for not less than 38 hours per fortnight or 19 hours per week.

An application for FIS in respect of the person concerned was submitted to this Department on 28th August 2017.

A Deciding Officer initially decided to disallow the person's application and the applicant was notified of the decision on 8th September 2017.

A Deciding Officer has subsequently reviewed this decision and decided that the person concerned is entitled to FIS from the date they applied for the payment. Notification of this decision will issue on 19th September 2017.

Household Benefits Scheme

710. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to replace or reinstate the telephone allowance for the elderly persons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39572/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The savings arising from the initial reduction and subsequent discontinuance of the telephone allowance meant that my Department was able to retain the other valuable elements of the household benefits package such as the electricity and gas allowance and the television licence. My Department will spend approximately €232 million this year on these elements of the household benefits package for over 429,000 customers.

The cost of the telephone allowance scheme had risen significantly each year, as the number of eligible customers grew. At the end of September 2013 there were almost 396,000 receiving the telephone allowance compared to approximately 316,000 people in 2007. This was an increase of 25%, or an average increase of nearly 4% per annum.

While the telephone allowance was of assistance to those who qualified for it, the nature of the market has been transformed in recent years with deregulation, mobile services and bundled services including television, broadband and telephone. It makes the former notion of an allowance covering handset rental, standing charges and a number of calls somewhat outdated, when similar assistance can be achieved by increasing the rate of core payments, which benefit people regardless of whether they have a landline or not, and which can be spent by the recipients either on their landline-related costs, or on something else of their own choosing.

The Government is keenly aware of the impact of Budget decisions on the Department's clients, and strives to ensure that the money available is targeted in the most effective way. In Budget 2016, the personal rate of the non-contributory pension was increased by €3, to €222, and the contributory pension was also increased by €3, to €233.30. There was also a €2.50 increase in the rate of the Fuel Allowance, from €20 to €22.50 per week.

In Budget 2017, there was a further increase in the rate of State pensions by €5, which has increased the maximum personal rate of the non-contributory pension to €227, and of the maximum rate of the contributory pension to €238.30.

Therefore, over the past two Budgets, the maximum weekly rate for State Pensions has increased by €8 per week, along with pro-rata increases for Increases for Qualified Adults. The value of these increases is well in excess of the value of the telephone allowance previously

provided.

Any decision to restore the telephone allowance would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations. In the previous two Budgets, the Government has concentrated resources on increasing the rate of the pension, rather than on the Household Benefits package.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Data Sharing Arrangements

711. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the steps that have been taken in sharing the personal data of those claiming social protection payments with driver licence data held by the RSA; the purpose of this project; if her departmental staff are to be involved in roadside checks; her views on the data rights of claimants; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39641/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The project relates to the verification of personal identity to a substantial level of assurance.

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 (i.e. verify their identity to a substantial level of assurance). 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.

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. It also facilitates the provision of high-value and personalised public services online – in a way that isn’t possible without robust identity verification.

My Department has been implementing SAFE 2 identity verification on a phased basis since 2011. More recently, other public service bodies have begun implementing it for their services. As a consequence, and in addition to services from my Department, SAFE 2 identity verification is now required for –

- First time adult passport applicants in the state.
- Replacement of lost, stolen or damaged passports issued prior to January 2005, where the person is resident in the State.
- Citizenship applications.
- Driver Theory Test Applicants.
- Access to high value or personal online public services, e.g. Social Protection’s MyWelfare and Revenue’s MyAccount services.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform recently published the eGovernment Strategy 2017 – 2020 which lists a number of additional public services for which SAFE 2 registration will be required over the next 18 months or so, with others likely to be added over time. That Strategy is available on the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform’s dedicated website at <http://egovstrategy.gov.ie/>

While the face-to-face meeting mentioned above is the usual method of SAFE 2 registering a person, the Department does operate other processes where possible. 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. Examples of this include some pensioners who have had a passport photograph verified in a face-to-face interaction at passport application and some Free Travel clients who personally collect their primary Social Welfare payments at a Post Office not needing to attend a Department office for a face-to-face interview but instead providing by post whatever other information is required to register them to SAFE 2.

In addition, and specifically with regard to the Deputy’s question, certain persons who have renewed their Driver’s Licence since March 2014 and in doing so have provided the Road Safety Authority with personal identity information and a photograph are also being offered the opportunity to complete the SAFE 2 registration process without attending a Department office. This is entirely voluntary and is being provided to people as a convenience rather than a requirement. Details of this initiative are set out in a Privacy Impact Assessment on my Department’s website at: www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/Privacy_Impact_Assessment_RSA_data-Jan2017.pdf.

In each of these approaches, as in the face-to-face meeting approach, photographs are checked against photographs from other SAFE registrations.

The SAFE 2 identity verification process has absolutely no connection whatsoever with the practice whereby Departmental Inspectors participate in Multi Agency Vehicle Checks with An Garda Síochána and a number of other agencies.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme

712. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will provide details of the background to the handling of an application for back to work enterprise allowance by a person (details supplied) in Dublin 9; the basis on which this application was declined; the social welfare record on which this decision was made; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39667/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy is aware from her previous correspondence with the relevant Area Manager, the person concerned was referred to Jobpath, one of the department's activation measures, earlier this year and was advised that they should discuss their business plans with their personal advisor, after which the advisor would be in a position to refer them to the relevant services to support their application. The person concerned failed to engage with the Jobpath service and decided in July this year to close his jobseeker claim. In August 2017 the person concerned submitted an application for Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) to the BTWEA policy section, this application was then forwarded to his local Intreo Centre for assessment. One of the primary eligibility criteria to qualify for BTWEA is that an applicant must be in receipt of a qualifying DEASP payment. As the person concerned had closed his jobseekers allowance claim in July and was not in receipt of any other qualifying payment, he did not qualify for BTWEA. The person concerned was advised in writing of this decision on 7th September 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Programme for Government Implementation

713. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the commitments in the programme for Government in relation to improving the lives of persons with disabilities. [29820/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): My Department is making progress across a number of commitments in the Programme for Government that relate to people with disabilities. In particular, the national network of Intreo centres is now available to people with disabilities who wish to engage, on a voluntary basis, with a case officer to develop a personal progression plan to assist them in exploring their employment goals. The programme also identifies the Comprehensive Employment Strategy as a key objective in securing better outcomes for persons with disabilities and in particular the issue of ensuring that "work always pays more than welfare". In this regard, the "Make Work Pay" Report (MWP), designed to help people with disabilities overcome barriers to finding work, was published in April last. The report made 24 recommendations. A number of actions relevant to my Department have already been implemented including; people with a long-term disability payment who move off the payment to get a job will retain their Free Travel Pass for a period of five years; a "fast-track" reinstatement of Disability Allowance, or Invalidity Pension for people where employment does not work out; and development is underway on a new "ready reckoner", to calculate the net benefits and financial implications of working.

Amending legislation dispensing with requirement that work must be of a rehabilitative nature is included in Social Welfare, Pensions and Civil Registration Bill 2017. There is a con-

siderable administrative burden attached to this process and therefore the proposed changes, in addition to refocussing on a person's capacity and avoiding any misunderstanding around the rehabilitative nature of work, will result in a reduction in the administrative burden on doctors and on the Department.

In addition, following my commitment at the launch of the report my Department has engaged on a wider consultation process with disability sectoral groups, people with disabilities and parents of people with disabilities, on recommendations 9 and 10 of the MWP report relating to early interventions. This consultation process demonstrates my commitment to ensuring that people with disabilities have an opportunity to input into this important policy area.

Other areas where there is progress include: an evaluation of the EmployAbility service completed in 2016 followed by the establishment of a working group to commence implementation of the operational recommendations contained in the report; increases of €5 per week in the maximum rate of weekly social welfare payments from March 2017; and promoting employment supports available to people with disabilities at the Department's Annual Jobs Fair.

Widow's Pension Eligibility

714. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the eligibility for widower's pension in the case of a person (details supplied); if her Department will accept a certified copy of a marriage certificate as evidence of preceding divorce with particular reference to the fact that a certified copy of same was accepted by authorities in Northern Ireland to proceed with a second marriage; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39707/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In order to qualify for a widower's contributory pension, the surviving spouse must be deemed, under Irish law, to be the legal widower of the deceased.

The person concerned was previously married in Ireland and subsequently divorced in Northern Ireland. In order for a foreign divorce to be recognised in this State, one of the parties must be domiciled in the country granting the divorce when proceedings were initiated. The provisions pertaining to the recognition of divorces outside the State are set out in Section 5 of the Domicile and Recognition of Foreign Divorces Act, 1986.

One of the criteria in establishing a domicile of choice would be that the person intended to reside permanently, or at least indefinitely, in the jurisdiction of the state granting the divorce. The evidence available to this Department shows that the person concerned and his first spouse, to whom he was legally married in Ireland, were domiciled in Ireland at the time their divorce proceedings were initiated in Northern Ireland.

The person concerned has been afforded the opportunity to provide evidence that would demonstrate that either party to the first marriage was domiciled in Northern Ireland at the time divorce proceedings were initiated. A certified copy of the certificate relating to the second marriage of the person concerned does not satisfy this criterion. No response has been received from the person concerned to date.

When a final decision on eligibility of the person concerned to widower(s) pension is made, the person will be notified in writing of the outcome. If the person concerned is not satisfied with the deciding officer's decision, they will be afforded the opportunity to appeal the decision to the independent Chief Appeals Officer, Social Welfare Appeals Office, D'Olier House, D'Olier Street, Dublin 2.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Offices

715. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will provide computer facilities for persons to search for jobs in the Dún Laoghaire social welfare office in view of the fact that the office has had no online facilities for persons to use since mid 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39708/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): *Jobsireland.ie* is a web service that enables employers to post job opportunities and jobseekers to search and apply for these opportunities online. There are currently almost 6,500 vacancies advertised on the site.

The service has been available since the 1990s and was originally provided on a website operated by FÁS. When my Department took over responsibility for the public employment service, it was clear that the website did not provide the range of functionality offered by public employment services in other European countries. In addition, the site operated on old technology which is now obsolete.

Accordingly my Department tendered for the provision of a new multi-functional service. The new service was introduced in July 2016. It enables employers and jobseekers to search for each other using competencies and skillsets as well as the traditional job type classifications. It also operates in the background to automatically match candidate CVs to job specifications posted by employers and notify both the candidates and the employers when a match is found. Employers and candidates can communicate with each other using system messaging.

The new service will shortly integrate with my Department's Intreo service and be of benefit to case workers as they support jobseekers in their efforts to find employment.

JobsIreland is accessible on a variety of devices such as Personal Computers, Laptops, Tablets and Smartphones. Jobseekers can also avail of internet facilities provided by Jobs Clubs, Local Employment Service, JobPath providers and Library Service. In Dún Laoghaire, these are provided by the Southside Partnership Local Employment Service (and Jobs Club), JobPath (Skills Team Employment Service) and the public library.

My Department has a National Contact Centre which provides employers and jobseekers who use the JobsIreland website with information, advice and support. Anyone needing assistance can contact the Centre by email at jobsireland@welfare.ie or by phone on 1890 800 024.

School Meals Programme

716. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the funding allocated to schools (details supplied); the funding that was used; the area in which unused funds will be spent; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39709/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The school meals programme provides funding towards the provision of food to schools and organisations at a total cost of some €47.5 million in 2017. As part of Budget 2017, the funding for the scheme was substantially increased this year by an additional €5.5 million (13% over the previous year's allocation) which will benefit over 50,000 additional children from September 2017 bringing the total number of schools in the scheme to some 1,700 and the number of chil-

dren supported to up to 250,000.

Budget 2017 funding provides for the inclusion in the scheme, from September 2017, of up to 240 new schools supporting 47,000 children. This includes 65 newly designated DEIS schools and 174 non-DEIS schools selected in consultation with the Department of Education and Skills. This is the first time in many years that increases are being provided outside of DEIS.

In addition, breakfast is available to all children attending DEIS schools and lunch is provided for the majority of children in these schools.

Applications for the scheme for the current school year are being received and processed. It is expected that the full funding available under the scheme will be allocated over the coming weeks.

Invalidity Pension Eligibility

717. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the eligibility for an invalidity pension in the case of a person (details supplied) who is currently in receipt of a disability allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39717/17]

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 lady concerned is in receipt of IP at the maximum weekly personal rate awarded with effect from 25 October 2012. In addition, she is in receipt of the living alone allowance, fuel allowance and a travel pass.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Payments

718. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the appropriate payment to be in receipt of in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39720/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Invalidity pension 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 gentleman concerned has been in receipt of invalidity pension since 11 June 2009. The department received a claim for widower's contributory pension from him on 02 August 2017 and he has an entitlement to this payment from 18 August 2017. However, social welfare legislation does not permit the payment of widower's pension at the same time as invalidity pension. As both payments are, in this case, payable at the same rate, he will remain on invalidity pension and benefit from additional Social Welfare benefits. The gentleman concerned was notified of this decision by letter on 08 August 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pensions Reform

719. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to improve the scrutiny of pension trustees in particular regarding situations in which they close a scheme to distribute the assets in a fair and timely fashion. [39721/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): All dealings and decisions made by corporate or individual trustees of an occupational pension scheme are governed by legislation and enforced through the supervision of the Pension Authority.

Legislation together with the trust deed and scheme rules sets out the trustees' duties and responsibilities. Trustees of pension schemes must act in the best financial interests of the scheme members and must serve all beneficiaries of the scheme impartially. If there is a conflict of interest then a person's duty as a trustee must take precedence over other interests.

The rules governing the role of a trustee member are constantly being enhanced. Earlier this year the Pensions Authority carried out a public consultation process on proposals to impose higher standards for trustees. The transposition of the new EU Directive IORP II by January 2019 will also further advance the duties and supervision of trustees.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Gender Equality

720. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the steps she will take to address the structural inequality caused by precarious work practices here which is adversely affecting the living standards of women. [39722/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Policy responsibility for gender equality in employment remains with my colleagues the Minister for Justice and Equality, Charlie Flanagan TD and David Stanton TD, Minister of State for Justice with special responsibility for Equality, Immigration, and Integration. To that end, the Department of Justice and Equality are currently undertaking a public consultation seeking views on the factors creating the gender pay gap. See attached link: <http://genderequality.ie/en/GE/Pages/WP17000002>.

Regarding my Department, 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.

Officials in my 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 before the end of the year, subject to Government approval.

Legislative Measures

721. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding the drafting of legislation to exclude compensation awards arising from a tragedy (details supplied) as means for social welfare payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39762/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Social welfare legislation provides for the disregard of certain compensation awards when assessing the means of a person for social assistance means testing purposes.

My Department is currently considering the appropriate legislative amendments for disregarding awards from the Stardust compensation scheme.

It should be noted that any such awards have been disregarded on an administrative basis since 15 December 2016 and accordingly, no such payments will be assessed as means for social welfare means testing purposes.

Illness Benefit Appeals

722. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a file will be referred to the social welfare appeals office for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39763/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Illness/Injury Benefit are payments available to persons who are unable to work due to incapacity. To claim a person must apply within a certain time frame which is laid down in regulations.

The person concerned claimed Illness/Injury Benefit on 8 November 2016 in respect of work incapacity following an occupational accident which occurred on 3 December 2015. As the claim was not made within the time frame allowed, it was not granted.

The person concerned appealed the decision to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office and the file was referred there on 18 September 2017 for determination. The person concerned will be informed of the decision.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy and my Department regrets the delay in submitting the case to the Appeals Office.

Jobseeker's Allowance Data

723. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the full cost in 2018 for abolishing the reduced jobseeker's allowance rates for persons under 26 years of age. [39792/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The full year cost of increasing the age-related reduced rates of Jobseeker's Allowance, from €102.70 per week (for 18 to 24 year olds) and €147.80 per week (for 25 year olds) to €193 per week is €108.9 million in 2018. This includes the cost of bringing the qualified adult rate for those on the €102.70 rate up to the maximum of €128.20 per week. It also includes the cost of increasing the equivalent age-related reduced rates for Supplementary Welfare Allowance.

It should be noted that these costings are subject to change over the coming weeks in the context of emerging trends and associated revision of the estimated numbers of recipients for 2018.

Child Benefit Data

724. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the full cost in 2018 of increasing child benefit in respect of children over 12 years of age by €30. [39793/17]

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 619,880 families in respect of some 1.2 million children, with an estimated expenditure of over €2 billion in 2017.

The estimated annual amount it would cost to increase Child Benefit by €30 for children over the age of 12 would be in the region of an additional €134 million.

The adoption of such a proposal would have significant cost implications and would have to be considered in an overall budgetary context.

Disability Allowance Applications

725. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will review an application for disability allowance in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39801/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm that my department received an application for disability allowance from this lady on 28 July 2017. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome. The processing time for individual disability allowance claims may vary in accordance with their relative complexity in terms of the three main qualifying criteria, the person's circumstances and the information they provide in support of their claim. I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pensions Reform

726. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to reform the pension system which currently discriminates against persons, mainly women, that took time out of the workforce prior to 1994 to care for children or elderly relatives; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39811/17]

736. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which she expects to be in a position to address the issues in the context of State pension provisions and the requirements of women that find themselves with insufficient contributions to qualify due to taking time off from the workforce while rearing their children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39885/17]

743. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to review the calculation basis for the contributory old age pension in view of the impact the averaging system is having on many women in particular that for different reasons took breaks from work and are now receiving lower pensions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39895/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 726, 736 and 743 together.

The State pension is a valuable benefit and is the bedrock of the pension system. There are two State pensions related to State pension age. The State pension (non-contributory) is a means-tested pension funded from taxation, whereas the State pension (contributory) is not means-tested and is paid from the Social Insurance Fund. Accordingly, it is important to ensure those qualifying for the latter 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.

The homemaker's scheme makes qualification for a higher rate of State pension contributory easier for those who take time out of the workforce for caring duties. The scheme, which was introduced in and took effect for periods from 1994, allows up to 20 years spent caring for children under 12 years of age, or caring for incapacitated people over that age, to be disregarded when a person's social insurance record is being averaged for pension purposes, subject to the standard qualifying conditions for State pension contributory also being satisfied. This has the effect of increasing the yearly average of the pensioner, which is used to set the rate of his or her pension.

Where someone does not qualify for a full rate contributory pension, they may qualify for an alternative payment. If their spouse has a contributory pension, they may qualify for an increase for a qualified adult, amounting up to 90% of a full rate pension. Alternatively, they may qualify for a means-tested State pension non-contributory, which amounts up to 95% of the maximum contributory rate.

The Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund in 2012 confirmed that the Fund provides better value to female rather than male contributors. This is due to the redistributive nature of the Fund. The average pension payments made by my Department to men and women over 66 years of age are within approximately 2% of each other.

Work is under way to replace the yearly average system with a Total Contributions Approach. Under this approach, the rate of pension paid will more closely reflect the total number of contributions made by people, not when they paid them. The position of homemakers is being carefully considered in developing this new system of calculating the State Pension (contributory).

It is hoped that this approach to pension qualification will replace the current one from 2020. Following completion of the actuarial review of the Social Insurance Fund this year, a refined proposal will be developed. My Department will conduct a period of consultation with relevant stakeholders, including interest groups, representative bodies and the Oireachtas. Following the consultation period, I will submit a proposal to Government seeking approval for the new approach, and then proceed to introduce legislation to give effect to this reform.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputies.

State Pensions

727. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to reinstate the State transition pension in order 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 years of age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39812/17]

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.

The State Pension (Transition) cost €137 million in 2013. 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. Therefore, reversing this decision would significantly increase the annual cost of State pensions, and 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 each 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 age 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.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

728. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) has been requested to reimburse her department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39831/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) was in payment to the person concerned from 11 October 2012 to 7 June 2017 in respect of one care recipient.

It is a condition for receipt of a CA that the carer is not engaged in employment or self-employment outside their home.

However, where a carer can show to the satisfaction of a deciding officer that adequate provision has been made for the care of the care recipient in their absence, a carer may engage in employment, self-employment, education or training courses as long as the duration of these combined activities do not exceed 15 hours per week.

Following a review, it was decided that the person concerned was not entitled to CA from 16 June 2016 to 7 June 2017 as he was engaged in employment outside his home in excess of 15 hours per week. As a result it was determined that he had been overpaid €10,433.40 during this period.

The person concerned was notified on 16 June 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal. A breakdown of the calculation of the debt was enclosed.

The person concerned wrote to my Department on 5 August 2017 stating that he was liaising with his employers but to date no further communication has been received from him.

The Department is obliged to seek recovery of debts owed to it as quickly as possible, having due regard to the circumstances of the debtor.

Accordingly my Department's Debt Recovery Unit wrote to the person concerned on 9 August 2017, 30 August 2017 and 12 September 2017, seeking a repayment of €100 weekly.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Back to Education Allowance Eligibility

729. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the situation regarding level 9 masters conversion courses (details supplied) in third level education; if a person can receive the back to education allowance while participating on these courses which are not masters programmes and are stand alone courses; and if she will make a

statement on the matter. [39877/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Back to Education Allowance Scheme (BTEA) is designed to support second chance education. It enables eligible persons to pursue approved education courses and to continue to receive income support for the duration of a course of study, subject to meeting certain conditions. Access to BTEA at postgraduate level is available to persons who wish to pursue a postgraduate course of study that leads to a level 8 higher diploma (H-Dip) qualification in any discipline or to persons in pursuit of a professional masters of education (primary and secondary school teaching). In addition the BTEA is also available where a person is admitted to a master's programme based solely on life experience and provided the applicant is not the holder of any third level qualification.

The BTEA is not intended to be an alternative form of funding for people entering or re-entering the third level education system. The Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) Grant, payable by the Department of Education and Skills, represents the primary support for persons pursuing education. The eligibility rules that govern the payment of a student maintenance grant are a matter for that Department.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Employment Data

730. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons currently in employment in the manufacturing and service sectors; the extent to which these figures have fluctuated in the past six years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39878/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Government policy on the promotion of employment is a matter for the Minister for Business Enterprise and Innovation and is set out in the Action Plan for Jobs.

According to the Central Statistics Office, the average annual level of employment for recent years in the sectors referred to is as set out in tabular form below.

Annual average employment ('000)

-	Manufacturing	Services
2011	212.3	1,413.7
2012	208.6	1,413.9
2013	212.9	1,430.4
2014	211.5	1,453.5
2015	220.2	1,474.4
2016	232.1	1,506.9

Carer's Allowance Data

731. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of recipients of carer's allowance; the extent to which this figure has fluctuated in the past six years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39879/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The

following table shows the number of carers receiving carer's allowance (CA) at the end of each year from 2011 to 2016

The CA scheme has seen a considerable increase in applications in recent years; applications for CA in 2016 were 20% higher than in 2015.

Claims received to the end of August 2017 have increased by 16% on the same period in 2016.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Year	Carer's allowance recipients% Increase on the previous year
2011	51,666+2%
2012	52,209+1%
2013	57,136+9%
2014	59,380+4%
2015	63,003+6%
2016	70,459+12%

Social Welfare Benefits Data

732. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of applicants for means tested social welfare payments in the past two years; the number granted, refused or pending; the degree to which these figures compare with the figures over the course of the past six years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39880/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The requested information has been provided in a tabular format for the principal Social Welfare schemes below.

Carer's Allowance

Year	Pending Year Start	Registered	Awarded	Rejected	Withdrawn	Pending Year End
2016	5,461	22,722	19,308	11,144	1,429	3,490
2015	4,461	18,929	14,378	7,920	1,888	5,461
2014	2,719	17,759	12,560	7,078	1,610	4,461
2013	8,553	12,060	16,011	9,881	2,529	2,719
2012	7,765	15,493	9,880	6,827	1,776	8,553
2011	3,769	17,758	7,465	5,227	1,194	7,765

Disability Allowance

Year	Pending Year Start	Registered	Awarded	Rejected	Withdrawn	Pending Year End
2016	4,855	23,804	16,669	12,027	947	5,947
2015	6,058	22,538	15,814	14,800	978	4,855
2014	5,022	21,071	13,876	12,621	1,111	6,058
2013	7,775	20,538	12,497	14,691	1,428	5,022
2012	6,999	25,887	10,400	14,519	1,240	7,775

2011	6,880	24,264	9,246	14,116	783	6,999
------	-------	--------	-------	--------	-----	-------

Family Income Supplement – New Claims

Year	Pending Year Start	Registered	Awarded	Rejected	Withdrawn	Pending Year End
2016	1,984	28,516	18,617	8,915	0	2,968
2015	1,780	31,191	21,779	9,208	0	1,984
2014	2,087	26,679	19,761	7,225	0	1,780
2013	7,360	24,965	20,156	10,082	0	2,087
2012	8,013	20,341	13,264	7,396	334	7,360
2011	5,133	23,453	13,631	6,448	494	8,013

Family Income Supplement – Renewed Claims

Year	Pending Year Start	Registered	Awarded	Rejected	Withdrawn	Pending Year End
2016	741	47,608	33,303	14,188	0	858
2015	695	42,714	31,130	11,538	0	741
2014	492	39,755	36,403	3,149	0	695
2013	3,491	32,879	33,091	2,787	0	492
2012	4,669	29,589	28,118	2,649	0	3,491
2011	2,654	27,761	23,787	1,959	0	4,669

State Pension Non-Contributory

Year	Pending Year Start	Registered	Awarded	Rejected	Withdrawn	Pending Year End
2016	2,058	9,213	8,132	2,332	1,170	1,762
2015	1,552	9,732	7,675	2,188	1,167	2,058
2014	1,780	8,998	7,750	2,350	1,131	1,552
2013	1,432	9,429	7,445	2,351	999	1,780
2012	1,869	9,035	7,243	2,453	1,149	1,432
2011	1,507	7,344	5,730	1,998	1,009	1,869

Table cont

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Total

Year	Pending Year Start	Registered	Awarded	Rejected	Withdrawn	Pending Year End
2016	3,567	290,097	178,623	18,673	8,760	3,559
2015	3,905	371,899	186,002	18,741	8,971	3,567
2014	3,762	400,479	206,828	22,116	9,697	3,905
2013	4,701	386,161	225,509	26,265	13,045	3,762
2012	6,371	453,833	253,652	34,315	16,301	4,701
2011	5,670	643,526	292,641	40,174	16,974	6,371

Jobseeker's Allowance

Questions - Written Answers

Year	Pending Year Start	Registered	Awarded	Rejected	Withdrawn	Pending Year End
2016	7,167	171,243	136,003	11,979	29,703	5,955
2015	8,074	191,781	152,807	13,255	30,059	7,167
2014	10,148	209,444	166,048	16,185	32,728	8,074
2013	18,464	227,722	180,009	18,952	39,269	10,148
2012	21,880	225,262	167,623	19,811	42,964	18,464
2011	26,377	239,667	174,491	23,017	48,347	21,880

One-Parent Family Payment

Year	Pending Year Start	Registered	Awarded	Rejected	Withdrawn	Pending Year End
2016	1,173	11,751	9,038	699	2,069	1,001
2015	1,452	11,484	8,905	743	4,011	1,173
2014	2,490	12,288	10,011	1,078	3,509	1,452
2013	3,369	13,887	10,673	1,357	4,219	2,490
2012	4,249	14,330	10,293	1,579	3,912	3,369
2011	5,250	16,943	12,178	2,032	4,384	4,249

Domiciliary Care Allowance

Year	Pending Year Start	Registered	Awarded	Rejected	Withdrawn	Pending Year End
2016	1,346	7,434	4,996	1,683	24	2,077
2015	1,237	6,422	4,186	2,102	25	1,346
2014	674	5,743	3,104	2,024	14	1,237
2013	478	4,464	1,877	2,442	21	694
2012	819	4,079	1,586	3,174	50	478
2011	690	5,191	2,686	3,768	37	819

Household Benefits

Year	Pending Year Start	Registered	Awarded	Rejected	Withdrawn	Pending Year End
2016	2079	75443	54871	16806	12689	3177
2015	5197	72826	52088	17282	12206	2079
2014	1855	69527	50999	14459	12094	5197
2013	2949	89463	72578	16030	15018	1855
2012	2566	82480	65844	15919	14136	2949
2011	4582	101812	83889	17297	16605	2566

Housing Assistance Payment

733. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons whose rent support has been reduced in the past two years; the extent, if known, to which the persons subsequently became homeless; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39882/17]

734. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social

Protection the extent to which she remains satisfied that the rent support system operated by her Department is adequate and sensitive to the needs of persons that find themselves under pressure from increased rent; if provisions in respect of the rent pressure zones have been sufficient to meet the demand; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39883/17]

735. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons currently in receipt of rent support; the cost on an annual basis; the extent to which new build local authority housing can address the housing need directly and in preference to rent support; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39884/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 733 to 735, inclusive, together.

Rent supplement plays a vital role in housing families and individuals, with the scheme currently supporting 38,600 recipients at a cost of €253 million in 2017.

The scheme is being administered to take account of the on-going rental market difficulties through the implementation of a targeted case-by-case approach that allows for flexibility where landlords seek rents in excess of the rent limits. In addition, a protocol arrangement is in place with Threshold and is operational in the areas where supply issues are particularly acute and rent pressure zones are in place covering Kildare, Dublin, Cork, Meath, Wicklow and Galway City. For 2017 to date, some 1,400 recipients have been supported with increased rent payments above the rent limits.

Rent supplement is a statutory means tested scheme, payable at differentiated rates of payment according to the applicant's means and accommodation requirements, and is normally calculated to ensure that a person, after the payment of rent, has an income equal to the rate of supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) appropriate to their family circumstances, less a weekly minimum contribution. Rent supplement entitlement is generally only reduced if the recipient has had an increase in their assessable means. Statistics are not maintained on the number of rent supplement payments reduced. The means assessment and differentiated rates of payment ensures that the payments target those most in need of assistance.

The Deputy will be aware that the strategic policy direction of my Department is to return rent supplement to its original purpose of being a short-term income support with the introduction of the HAP scheme. Policy in relation to HAP and new build local authority housing is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputies.

Question No. 736 answered with Question No. 726.

Unemployment Levels

737. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position with regard to youth and the long-term unemployed; the progress made in addressing these issues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39886/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Government's primary strategy to tackle unemployment – including long-term unemployment and youth unemployment – is twofold. The Action Plan for Jobs supports continuing strong economic recovery and employment growth. Policies and actions to ensure that unemployed people benefit from the increase in employment are set out in the strategy paper Pathways to

Work 2016-2020.

To date, these policies have been effective in reducing both youth and long-term unemployment.

For example, the most recent data show that Irish youth unemployment has fallen from a peak of 31.2% in 2012 to 12.7% in August 2017. Irish youth unemployment has thus fallen from well above the EU average in 2012 (23%) to well below the current EU figure of 19.1%.

Over the same period, the rate of long-term unemployment in Ireland has fallen from a peak of 9.5% to 3.6%.

Both the youth and long-term figures can be expected to fall further this year and next in line with the continuing forecast fall in overall unemployment.

Policy continues to focus on support for the long-term unemployed and young unemployed. For example, the Pathways to Work 2016-2020 strategy prioritises long-term unemployed people – most notably through the roll-out of JobPath to engage more systematically with this group; through targeted wage subsidies under JobsPlus; and through reserved places for long-term unemployed jobseekers on employment and training programmes.

Under the Youth Guarantee process there is monthly engagement by case officers with unemployed young people to assist them to prepare and implement personal progression plans for employment. Where young people do not find work quickly, additional supports are offered through places on employment and training schemes.

These current and planned measures, together with the continuing strong performance of the economy, will support further reductions in long term unemployment and youth unemployment.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

738. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of applications for disability allowance and invalidity pension made in each of the past four years; the number granted, refused or pending; the number referred to appeal; the number of cases in which the original decision was overturned on appeal; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39887/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The number of disability allowance (DA) and invalidity pension (INVP) applications received, allowed, disallowed and pending at the end of each year from 2013 to 2016 are set out in the following tables.

DA Scheme

Year	DA Received	*DA Award	DA Disallowed	DA Withdrawn	DA Pending end of year
2013	20538	12497*	14691	1428	5022
2014	21071	13876*	12621	1111	6058
2015	22538	15814*	14800	978	4855
2016	23804	16669*	12027	947	5947

INVP Scheme

Year	INVP Received	*INVP Award	INVP Disallowed	INVP-Withdrawn	INVP Pending end of year
2013	9640	9494*	8546	752	2013
2014	9240	7018*	5496	1047	2034
2015	9454	7691*	5070	1039	1559
2016	9134	7467*	3909	972	2133

(*) Please note that the statistics 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 the number of DA & INVP appeals received and allowed or partially allowed by the social welfare appeals office (SWAO) from 2013 to 2016

Outcome of DA appeals received and allowed by SWAO

Year	DA appeals received	DA appeals allowed by SWAO	DA appeals partially allowed by SWAO
2013	6836	3882	84
2014	5554	3860	100
2015	6435	3384	85
2016	4912	2830	88

Outcome of INVP appeals received and allowed by SWAO

Year	INVP appeals received	INVP appeals allowed by SWAO	INVP appeals partially allowed by SWAO
2013	4501	3336	18
2014	2571	2133	15
2015	1857	1135	17
2016	1362	682	10

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Waiting Times

739. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the action taken to reduce the delays in processing social welfare appeals; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39888/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I am advised by the Chief Appeals Officer that the management and reduction of appeal processing times is a key priority which is kept under constant scrutiny. Tables showing the average appeal processing times for all appeals determined from 2014 to date in 2017 broken down by all social welfare scheme types are attached below.

The Deputy will be aware from previous replies that significant effort and resources have been devoted over the past number of years to reforming the appeals process in order to finalise appeals as quickly and effectively as possible, while recognising the need to ensure that quality and fairness are not compromised. Additional appeals officers were appointed and a new operating model and new technology to support appeals officers was introduced. As a result

appeal processing times improved year on year since 2011/2012. For example, the average time taken to determine an appeal requiring an oral hearing reduced from 52.5 weeks in 2011 to 28.6 weeks in 2014, 25.5 weeks in 2015 and 24.1 weeks in 2016. The average time taken to finalise an appeal decided by way of a summary decision reduced from 25.1 weeks in 2011 to 21.1 weeks in 2014, 18.1 weeks in 2015, and 17.6 weeks in 2016.

There has been a slight increase in overall appeal processing times to date in 2017 with appeals requiring an oral hearing taking an average of 25.5 weeks and summary decisions taking 19.1 weeks to finalise. However the Chief Appeals Officer has advised that processing times should improve when a number of recently appointed Appeals Officers who replaced more experienced colleagues who retired become more experienced in their roles.

The time taken to process an appeal reflects all aspects of the appeal process including the time spent in the Department preparing the appeal submission. The quasi-judicial nature of the system impacts on appeal processing times which are proportionate to the complexity of many of the issues under appeal which often require a high level of judgement, in addition to the need to ensure due process and natural justice.

The Chief Appeals Officer has advised me that every effort will continue to be made to improve appeal processing times.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Appeals processing times by scheme 01/01/2014 – 31/12/14

-	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
Adoptive Benefit	17.1	-
Blind Pension	20.5	24.9
Carers Allowance	30.1	34.4
Carers Benefit	22.9	23.1
Child Benefit	23.8	32.9
Disability Allowance	20.8	26.7
Illness Benefit	29.5	34.8
Domiciliary Care Allowance	22.6	29.1
Deserted Wives Benefit	-	64.7
Deserted Wives Allowance	-	41.8
Farm Assist	23.2	28.3
Bereavement Grant	25.6	31.9
Family Income Supplement	26.0	32.6
Invalidity Pension	25.9	31.2
Liable Relatives	21.5	33.2
One Parent Family Payment	24.4	33.5
Maternity Benefit	22.4	44.7
Partial Capacity Benefit	48.5	48.5
State Pension (Contributory)	25.2	41.9
State Pension (Non-Cont)	20.3	29.4
State Pension (Transition)	27.0	35.1
Occupational Injury Benefit	33.6	33.7
Disablement Pension	23.6	30.6

-	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Occupational Injury Benefit (Medical)	-	53.9
Incapacity Supplement	21.5	59.6
Guardian's Payment (Con)	25.9	24.9
Guardian's Payment (Non-con)	19.7	30.3
Pre Retirement Allowance	17.3	-
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	18.1	27.5
Jobseeker's Allowance	16.2	21.1
JA/JB Fraud Control	12.1	-
Jobseeker's Benefit	16.7	21.1
Treatment Benefit	20.8	-
Respite Care Grant	24.9	27.1
Insurability of Employment	45.0	62.3
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	14.4	22.1
Survivor's Pension (Con)	20.2	32.5
Survivor's Pension (Non-Con)	24.7	24.6
Widowed Parent Grant	22.2	-
All Appeals	21.1	28.6

Appeals processing times by scheme 01/01/2015 – 31/12/2015

-	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Blind Person's Pension	21.1	30.7
Carers Allowance	20.6	25.9
Carers Benefit	19.7	21.8
Child Benefit	24.8	34.7
Disability Allowance	15.8	21.4
Illness Benefit	26.3	33.1
Partial Capacity Benefit	25.7	43.4
Domiciliary Care Allowance	21.7	28.7
Deserted Wives Benefit	19.7	26.2
Deserted Wives Allowance	-	16.2
Farm Assist	21.0	28.6
Bereavement Grant	65.7	26.0
Death Benefit (Pension)	-	22.6
Family Income Supplement	19.4	27.7
Invalidity Pension	26.2	28.4
Liable Relatives	22.8	31.2
Maternity Benefit	22.6	17.5
One Parent Family Payment	22.9	33.9

Questions - Written Answers

-	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
State Pension (Contributory)	26.0	46.0
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	20.4	30.8
State Pension (Transition)	80.1	53.4
Occupational Injury Benefit	20.3	35.0
Disablement Pension	23.7	35.3
Incapacity Supplement	41.2	51.5
Guardian's Payment (Con)	18.2	27.5
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	18.7	31.0
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	15.8	26.0
Jobseeker's Allowance	15.2	21.9
JA/JB Fraud Control	-	46.1
BTW Family Dividend	14.1	-
Jobseeker's Transitional	12.9	21.3
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	21.0	30.3
Jobseeker's Benefit	14.3	21.2
Pre-Retirement Allowance	15.0	-
Treatment Benefit	17.9	-
Carer's Support Grant *	21.2	23.6
Insurability of Employment	47.6	69.4
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	13.1	23.5
Survivor's Pension (Con)	24.1	46.6
Survivor's Pension (Non-con)	23.7	38.3
Widows Parent Grant	18.4	-
All Appeals	18.1	25.5

* Previously called Respite Care Grant

Appeal processing times by scheme 01/01/2016 – 31/12/2016

-	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Blind Person's Pension	18.2	33.8
Carers Allowance	17.6	21.6
Carers Benefit	20.7	22.4
Child Benefit	22.1	38.2
Disability Allowance	14.6	20.1
Illness Benefit	27.2	34.3
Partial Capacity Benefit	27.3	33.6
Domiciliary Care Allowance	24.3	30.6
Deserted Wives Benefit	13.0	32.8

-	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Farm Assist	21.9	26.0
Bereavement Grant	23.1	-
Death Benefit (Pension)	19.7	-
Liabile Relatives	14.0	16.9
Family Income Supplement	20.4	25.5
Invalidity Pension	21.3	28.2
Maternity Benefit	18.9	21.7
One Parent Family Payment	21.7	31.9
State Pension (Contributory)	25.6	45.9
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	22.7	32.9
State Pension (Transition)	67.7	61.3
Occupational Injury Benefit	25.0	31.9
Disablement Pension	25.8	26.8
Incapacity Supplement	27.7	50.9
Guardian's Payment (Con)	15.8	24.5
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	18.4	23.3
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	16.7	25.5
Jobseeker's Allowance	16.0	20.9
BTW Family Dividend	21.0	-
Jobseeker's Transitional	19.0	22.3
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	32.5	31.6
Jobseeker's Benefit	16.0	27.2
Treatment Benefit	17.1	-
Carer's Support Grant *	18.1	23.3
Insurability of Employment	36.6	85.7
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	15.0	24.1
Survivor's Pension (Con)	16.6	28.8
Survivor's Pension (Non-con)	18.4	23.4
Widows Parent Grant	23.5	63.8
All Appeals	17.6	24.1

* Previously called Respite Care Grant

Appeal processing times by Scheme 01 January 2017- 31 August 2017

Questions - Written Answers

-	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Blind Person's Pension	16.0	24.4
Carers Allowance	20.9	23.6
Carers Benefit	16.2	21.0
Child Benefit	21.6	30.3
Disability Allowance	17.7	22.7
Illness Benefit	27.4	31.5
Partial Capacity Benefit	39.4	28.0
Domiciliary Care Allowance	24.5	32.2
Deserted Wives Benefit	-	13.7
Farm Assist	20.5	23.9
Bereavement Grant	15.1	-
Death Benefit (Pension)	102.1	-
Family Income Supplement	17.3	30.1
Invalidity Pension	16.0	21.3
Liabile Relatives	18.9	24.1
Maternity Benefit	18.6	20.0
Paternity Benefit	22.7	-
One Parent Family Payment	23.2	33.1
State Pension (Contributory)	28.5	40.8
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	23.7	35.8
State Pension (Transition)	81.1	-
Occupational Injury Benefit	17.6	26.4
Disablement Pension	19.2	30.3
Medical Care	-	27.3
Incapacity Supplement	54.2	41.5
Guardian's Payment (Con)	26.3	23.9
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	15.7	26.7
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	17.8	25.2
Jobseeker's Allowance	16.4	25.0
BTW Family Dividend	18.8	27.5
Jobseeker's Transitional	19.3	29.4
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	27.8	-
Jobseeker's Benefit	17.1	23.0
Carer's Support Grant *	18.5	23.7
Treatment Benefit	14.0	-
Insurability of Employment	38.0	92.4
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	15.8	23.7
Survivor's Pension (Con)	21.8	35.4

-	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Survivor's Pension (Non-con)	20.4	21.9
Widowed Parent Grant	14.1	-
All Appeals	19.1	25.5

* Previously called Respite Care Grant

Unemployment Data

740. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which the age profile of those on the live register has been recorded, categorised and listed for specific alleviation measures; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39889/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The official measure of unemployment is sourced from the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS). Measures of unemployment from the QNHS are based on International Labour Office (ILO) definitions. To be 'ILO unemployed' a person must in the week before the survey be without work but available for work and have recently taken specific job-search steps. The Live Register, which captures those registering for unemployment benefits (including those working part-time and in casual work who draw partial unemployment payments), is an administrative record. It is not the official measure of unemployment, but can give indicative trends.

My Department uses both Live Register and QNHS data for reporting and monitoring trends and adjusting policies accordingly at national level. This includes analysing data and trends broken down by age categories. The QNHS data, being prepared as part of the EU-wide Labour Force Survey, also allow Irish trends to be compared with international developments.

The Pathways to Work strategy, the key document setting out policy to facilitate the unemployed of all ages back into work, is underpinned by analyses of the labour market situation based on the statistical sources mentioned above.

By allocating activation resources to persons on the Live Register, the government's policy tends automatically to focus on those areas and age-groups in which unemployment is most concentrated. The focus on those most in need is further reinforced by the use of profiling to identify, among the newly unemployed, those most likely to face severe difficulties in re-entering employment. People identified as having a low PEX (probability of exit from unemployment) score are prioritised for intensive engagement and support from the Intreo employment service.

In addition, the Youth Guarantee initiative is specifically aimed at those aged under 25 years who are unemployed with specific targeting of those who are either long-term unemployed or are most at risk of becoming long-term unemployed.

Summary statistical information on the clients' age, duration of unemployment, and last held occupation together with other demographic and regional information is published on the Central Statistics Office website.

Social Welfare Eligibility

741. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the extent to which the previously self employed and current unemployed are able to access the relevant welfare payments; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39890/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Government is committed to encouraging self-employment and entrepreneurship. This includes enhancing the position of the self-employed through a supportive tax regime and, very importantly, improving the level of PRSI based benefits available to self-employed people.

Self-employed persons are liable for PRSI at the Class S rate of 4% which covers them for access long-term benefits such as State pension (contributory) and widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's pension (contributory) as well as some treatment benefits, maternity benefit, adoptive benefit and guardians payment (contributory).

Since March 2017, Class S contributions have enabled self-employed people access to the treatment benefit scheme which includes free eye and dental examinations, and contributions towards the cost of hearing aids. Treatment benefit entitlements will also be extended from October 2017 so as to provide further dental and optical benefits.

Even more significantly, self-employed contributors will be covered for invalidity pension from December 2017. For the first time, this will give the self-employed access to the safety net of State income supports if they become permanently incapable of work as a result of an illness or disability without having to go through a means test. This is a real advance in the level of cover available to the self-employed.

Self-employed workers may also access social welfare supports by establishing eligibility to assistance-based payments such as jobseeker's allowance and disability allowance. A person may qualify for the means-tested jobseeker's allowance if their business ceases or if they are on low income as a result of a downturn in demand for their services.

People who were previously self-employed and are now in receipt of jobseeker's allowance – and thus are on the Live Register – have access to the full range of activation measures and supports available to other jobseeker's allowance recipients. This includes referral to group information sessions, 1-2-1 interviews and subsequent caseworker support. It also includes access to training, temporary employment, work-experience and recruitment subsidy programmes.

Any decision to improve these provisions in relation to self-employed persons would be a matter for Government to consider in a Budgetary context.

Social Welfare Schemes

742. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the steps available to her to address issues of one-parent families that have experienced a reduction in their income from the one parent family allowance notwithstanding the various alternatives on offer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [39891/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department currently provides a number of income supports to lone parents. These include the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) until the youngest child is 7 years of age and the Jobseeker's Transitional Payment (JST) payment where the youngest child is aged 7-13 years. The Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) payment can also be paid to lone parents where the youngest child is aged 14 or over. The Family Income Supplement (FIS) is also available to lone parents who

are working 19 or more hours per week. Lone parents who move to FIS can also apply for the Back to Work Family Dividend (BTWFD).

In most cases entitlement to the OFP payment ends when the youngest child reaches 7 years of age, however, there are special provisions for those caring, in receipt of Blind Pension or recently bereaved that extend the age of the youngest child beyond 7 years of age. The majority of customers transition from OFP to the JST, FIS or JA schemes when their OFP entitlement ends.

Lone parents who are not working outside the home can transition to JST when their OFP ends. These customers do not suffer an income loss when they move to JST as JST is paid at the same rate as OFP. Budget 2016 aligned the JST means test more closely with the OFP means test resulting in a more generous means test for JST customers. Budget 2017 also increased the income disregards on OFP and JST to €110 per week. This in effect means that lone parents who are working and earning less than €110 per week see no change in their welfare payment when they move from OFP to JST. Those earning over €110 per week may lose a maximum of up to €7.60 per week. This is due to the banded rates for OFP compared to JST.

Lone parents who transition to FIS may suffer an income loss however, they also gain access to the BTWFD. It is important to note that lone parents on FIS have been lifted out of poverty due to a combination of earnings and the FIS supports. It is not possible for a lone parent to be in receipt of FIS and be within the definition of consistent poverty. Lone parents who increase their hours of work and become new FIS recipients will see an increase in their overall income.

Budgets 2015, 2016 and 2017 have all included measures that benefitted lone parents. The Department's social impact assessment of the impact of Budget 2017 showed an increase of 1.2%, equating to just over €8 per week for working lone parents, and 4.5% equating to just over €16 per week for those who are not working. This represents a cumulative increase across Budgets 2015, 2016 and 2017 of almost €27 per week for working lone parents and just over €24 per week for lone parents who are not working. This shows definite progress with the commitment to reducing poverty for lone parents and their families.

In addition to these income supports lone parents also have access to the Department's Intreo service and the associated training, education and employment supports to assist them towards employment and financial independence. All JST recipients receive a one to one meeting with a case officer from the Department who assists them to produce a personal development plan and guides them towards appropriate education, and employment opportunities. While the customer is on the JST payment access to these supports are potentially available for up to seven years. This is a much broader support than the 12 month engagement that normally applies for jobseekers from their one to one meeting. The aim of this broader support is to improve the individual's employment prospects. Lone parents on a JA payment also gain access to the full range of Intreo supports available to assist them into training, education and employment.

The income and activation supports outlined above combine to ensure that there are effective resources available to lone parents.

Question No. 743 answered with Question No. 726.

Question No. 744 withdrawn.

Register of Electors

745. Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Gov-

ernment the persons entitled to vote in referendums and Presidential elections here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39292/17]

746. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the elections in Ireland an Irish citizen is entitled to vote in; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39296/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 745 and 746 together.

Irish citizens are entitled to vote at Presidential, Dáil, European Parliament and local elections as well as in referendums. British citizens may vote at Dáil, European Parliament and local elections. Citizens of the European Union may vote at European Parliament and local elections while non-European Union citizens may vote in local elections only.

In general, to exercise their right to vote, all such persons must be ordinarily resident in the State, have reached the age of 18 years and be registered on the register of electors for the constituency or local electoral area in which they ordinarily reside.

Nitrates Usage

747. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if conditions are in place for low nitrate rate, low risk farmers (details supplied); the details of those farmers exempt from this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39317/17]

748. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the same rules are applicable in circumstances in which farmers have drains running into rivers (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39318/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 747 and 748 together.

In accordance with the Nitrates Directive, Ireland's Nitrates Action Programme is due for review this year. Negotiations with the European Commission are ongoing with a view to having a revised Nitrates Action Programme in place by the end of 2017.

As part of the review, a full public consultation process was undertaken and this closed on 3 May 2017. All submissions received on foot of this consultation have been given full consideration by an expert group comprising officials from my Department, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Teagasc and the Environmental Protection Agency. The report of the expert group, together with the group's recommendations, was recently published on my Department's website.

It would be inappropriate to comment on any specific aspects of the review process, or to anticipate any final outcomes, in advance of the conclusion of negotiations with the European Commission.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme

749. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason for limiting the terms of the mortgage to rent scheme to only those persons

that qualify for social housing; his plans to extend the scheme in order that persons with distressed mortgages may qualify; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39749/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Mortgage to Rent scheme introduced in 2012 is targeted at those households in mortgage arrears who are eligible for social housing support whose mortgage is unsustainable and who have very limited options, if any, to meet their long-term housing needs themselves. One of the main criteria underpinning the MTR scheme is that it is a social housing option and therefore it is targeted at those borrowers in arrears who qualify for social housing support as prescribed by the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011. A review of the income eligibility limits for social housing supports, as part of the broader social housing reform agenda as set out in the Social Housing Strategy 2020, is scheduled to commence later this year.

The Mortgage to Rent scheme is a social housing option and, therefore, is only open to borrowers who qualify for social housing support. The Mortgage Arrears Resolution Service, Abhaile, is available to assist borrowers to explore their options. The Abhaile communications campaign is aimed primarily at securing engagement and solutions for those in the longest arrears and who are not engaging with their lender and seeks to overcome the fear and anxiety associated with such circumstances, and to ensure that borrowers are made aware of the range of supports available to them.

Housing Policy

750. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to address the lack of affordable and secure rental accommodation available to a significant share of the population; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39050/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): 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 housing affordability is being examined by my Department, 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.

The Strategy for the Rental Sector, reflecting the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to develop a “cost rental” model for Ireland, already commits my Department to establish and lead an expert group to develop a viable cost rental model for the Irish rental sector. The Expert Group will assess the benefits that a larger and more developed not-for-profit component of the rental market would bring to the rental sector and the housing system, by increasing supply of more affordable rental accommodation for low to middle-income households and develop proposals to ensure that new capacity to do so is developed. Following the conclusion of the focused review of Rebuilding Ireland, it is my intention to establish this expert group in the coming weeks. A proposal regarding its membership and terms of reference is currently being finalised in my Department.

Housing Estates

751. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will consider making funding available for the taking in charge of estates other than ghost estates in circumstances in which the builder has gone bankrupt with no bond in place; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that local authorities are slow to take estates in charge in circumstances in which no bond is in place and works have been left undone; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39136/17]

752. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of housing estates in each county that have not been taken in charge by local authorities for which no bond was in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39137/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 751 and 752 together.

The taking-in-charge of housing estates is a matter for the relevant local authority.

Section 180 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) provides that in the case of an unfinished estate, where the planning authority has commenced enforcement proceedings within seven years of the expiry of the planning permission or considers that enforcement proceedings will not result in the satisfactory completion of the estate, following a request by the majority of the house-owners, the authority may at its absolute discretion initiate procedures to take in charge the roads and some or all of the other services in the estate.

A planning authority may, for the purposes of section 180, hold a plebiscite to ascertain the wishes of the house-owners. Where bonds are not available or enforceable or are insufficient to cover the costs of repairs or works necessary to achieve a sufficient standard of finish, and the local authority in question wishes to take the relevant estate in charge, then that authority will have to seek alternative sources of funding from its own sources or complementary sources of funding from other stakeholders such as new investors in part-completed developments.

My Department developed the National Taking-in-Charge Initiative (NTICI) to accelerate the taking-in-charge process of housing developments, taking into account a build-up of pending cases, underpinned by €10 million in funding. Of the funding allocated, €7.7 million was paid to local authorities in respect of 330 developments, containing some 13,400 units.

The NTICI was not intended to establish a rolling annual funding programme to take in charge all estates not yet taken in charge, but was instead intended to develop better local authority, departmental and stakeholder knowledge and systems to support and streamline the taking-in-charge of further estates over time.

Therefore, while there is no corresponding funding line available in 2017, the NTICI highlighted the various roles that local authorities, housing providers, development funders and statutory bodies like Irish Water could play in aiding the taking-in-charge of residential developments.

A report on the NTICI is currently being finalised by my Department which will include findings and recommendations on sustaining progress on the taking-in-charge issue. This will help to inform future taking-in-charge plans.

Housing Assistance Payment Data

753. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local

Government the number of checks carried out by his Department on HAP properties; the time between approval to join the scheme and the first inspection; the position in the event that an inspection results in a fail; the number of properties and or landlords that have been removed from HAP having failed an inspection; the obligations of landlords of failed properties to the sitting tenants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39187/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Minimum standards for rental accommodation are prescribed in the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017, made under section 18 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992. All landlords, including those in receipt of Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), have a legal obligation to ensure that their rented properties comply with these regulations and responsibility for the enforcement of the regulations rests with the relevant local authority. Under the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, local authorities have a strengthened legislative framework available to them which provides for the issuing of Improvement Notices and Prohibition Notices where landlords are in breach of their obligations. Fines for non-compliance with the regulations were also increased; the maximum fine increased from €3,000 to €5,000 and the fine for each day of a continuing offence increased to €400.

Under Section 12 of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as amended), landlords are obliged to: ensure that their property is in good condition; maintain the property to the standard it was at the start of the tenancy; and reimburse the tenants for any repairs carried out on the structure.

The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme is underpinned by the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014. Under section 41 of the 2014 Act, local authorities are required to commence the inspection process within 8 months of the commencement of HAP support being provided in relation to a particular dwelling if not already inspected within the previous 12 months. HAP may be provided on a property which is the subject of a subsisting improvement notice under section 18A of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992. HAP shall not be, or shall cease to be, provided on a property which is the subject of proceedings or a prohibition notice under section 18B of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992. Where a prohibition notice has come into effect, HAP may continue to be paid for 13 weeks from the date of HAP commencing or the notice coming into force, as appropriate.

Following the completion of the statutory phased roll-out of the HAP scheme in March 2017, the HAP Shared Services Centre, which provides a central transactional service for all local authorities and is operated by Limerick City and County Council, updated the ICT system used for HAP supported tenancies in order to assist local authorities in recording their compliance with their legislative obligations. The inspections module went live in July 2017 and the HAP SSC is working with local authorities to ensure consistency.

This new module will provide improved information in relation to inspections of HAP properties and the information reported by local authorities under the module will be kept under regular review.

Data in relation to all private rental inspections carried out by local authorities can be found at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-building-and-private-rented/private-housing-market-statistics>.

Housing Adaptation Grant Data

754. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the allocation Tipperary County Council received for the housing adaptation grant for persons with a disability, home owner, local authority tenant, housing aid for older people and mobility aids grant in 2017; the percentage of this allocation compared to 2016; the percentage of that allocation that has been received by Tipperary County Council for each grant category; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39199/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability assist people in private houses to have necessary adaptations, repairs or improvement works carried out in order to make their accommodation more suitable for their needs. The 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 2017 allocation for Tipperary County Council is €2,426,184 which is 104% of the 2016 allocation. During 2016, the Council drew down 65% of the allocation, broken down into 15.6%, 40.6% and 8.8%, respectively, in respect of the Housing Aid for Older People, Housing Adaptation and Mobility Aids grants. On top of the exchequer funding amounts, the local authority made a further 20% contribution in respect of these grants.

The Disabled Persons Grant Scheme provides funding for adaptations to existing social housing stock such as grab rails, disabled access ramps, wet rooms, etc. The Scheme also supports extensions in cases of overcrowding. During 2016, my Department provided funding of €522,243 to the Council under the scheme and this year their allocation is €411,695; which is 79% of their 2016 funding. On top of the exchequer funding amounts, the local authority also makes a further 10% contribution in respect of these grants. While the allocation for this year is lower than the amount they received in 2016, my Department will be closely monitoring the spend on the scheme and where local authorities are underspending, the Department can give consideration to increasing allocations to local authorities following a request from them for additional funding.

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. I am conscious of the social benefit accruing from the Schemes and further consideration will be given to increasing the funding over the coming years.

Rental Accommodation Scheme Administration

755. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the supports that are being provided to local authorities to find replacement housing for tenants under the rental accommodation scheme in circumstances in which landlords withdraw from the scheme due to limits of the rent pressure zones; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39200/17]

756. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the powers available to local authorities to continue to support housing under the rental accommodation scheme in rent reviews within rent pressure zones which result in significant differences with open market rent prices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39201/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 755 and 756 together.

Under the terms of the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS), local authorities retain the

responsibility to source further accommodation for a household accommodated under RAS, should the dwelling that the household is living in become unavailable through no fault of their own. It is a matter for local authorities to make every effort to secure suitable alternative accommodation for any household in RAS in the circumstances outlined as quickly as possible.

In light of the pressures on the rental market in certain locations, it can be difficult to source new RAS properties. In all cases, not just where a tenancy is under threat, there is no bar on RAS households from sourcing alternative accommodation themselves, if they so desire, independent of the local authority. Once the local authority is satisfied that the accommodation meets the needs of the household and conforms to standards for rental accommodation, which are set out in the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017, the property can be brought into RAS.

Where possible, local authorities are guided to agree rents which equate to circa one month's rent less than the market rate over a given 12 month period (annualised saving of 8% on market rate) to represent the level of risk transferred to each local authority. However, where there is difficulty in a local authority securing RAS accommodation, there is flexibility in relation to the discount in market rates, at the discretion of the individual local authority. A local authority may also allocate a property to a social housing tenant if a RAS tenancy cannot be sourced.

The issue of properties where landlords have maintained rents at levels substantially below the rents currently being sought has come up in the review of the Rent Predictability Measure and the operation of the Rent Pressure Zones. In a Rent Pressure Zone the rent increases available to these landlords will be well below those achievable by landlords who have been charging higher rents and driving the rent inflation in the area. The review has considered the potential implications for RAS tenancies. Any changes found by the review to be necessary will be addressed in the wider review of Rebuilding Ireland.

At the end of 2016, local authorities report that there were 20,306 households supported by RAS. A further 540 households transferred from Rent Supplement to RAS between January and July 2017. RAS remains a significant part of the suite of social housing options currently available to those who are assessed as being in need of housing support.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

757. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of an application for funding for the upgrade and realignment of the Ardmore road to accelerate housing provision at Ardmore, Mullingar, County Westmeath submitted by Westmeath County Council under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation fund in November 2016; and if this application will be responded to in a timely manner to enable Westmeath county council install this infrastructure and help address housing supply issues. [39203/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): A call for proposals under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund was issued to all local authorities in August 2016. It was open to all local authorities to apply for funding towards the capital cost of the public infrastructure, which when provided, would secure the early delivery of additional affordable housing at considerable scale, with developments in excess of 500 units in the Dublin area, or in excess of 200 units in areas outside Dublin.

21 local authorities submitted a total of 74 proposals in October 2016. The overall funding sought by Local Authorities was far in excess of the funding available. Westmeath County Council submitted two proposals in respect of Mullingar and Athlone.

On 28 March 2017, I announced funding for 34 projects under the LIHAF. The cost of these projects is €226.46 million, of which €169.65 million would be funded under LIHAF with local authorities funding the remaining €56.81 million. These public infrastructure projects will be key to the delivery of 23,000 housing units over the next four years, with a longer term projection of up to 70,000 units as the selected sites are fully built out.

Westmeath County Council received approval for its project at Athlone, with an allocation of €1.83m. However, due to the substantial oversubscription of proposals, it was not possible to approve other valid and worthy proposals, including the Mullingar proposal referenced by the Deputy, within the funding available.

I am seeking additional funding for LIHAF under the review of the Capital Plan 2016-2021, but it will be a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, to consider in the context of other demands for the available funds. In the event that more funds are secured, proposals that did not receive funding will be reconsidered and Local Authorities will also have an opportunity to advance new proposals that would meet LIHAF objectives.

Property Tax Administration

758. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position that would arise if a local authority were not to notify his Department by the designated date of its decision in respect of the local property tax for the following year; the process that would be followed by his Department in such a circumstance to notify the Revenue Commissioners of the LPT from that local authority for the following year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39237/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Effective from 1 July 2014, local authorities may vary the rate of Local Property Tax (LPT) in their administrative area for the following year by up to 15% of the basic rate of the tax. Elected members are responsible in law for adoption of the local authority's annual budget, and the power to vary LPT rates has enabled them to directly influence the level of LPT income available to meet their expenditure requirements. The power to vary LPT rates was assigned to local authorities to further increase their autonomy.

In accordance with LPT legislation, the decision to vary must be taken by resolution of the Council and be notified to the Revenue Commissioners and to the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government by 30 September in order to apply for the following year. It is a matter for the local authority concerned to notify the Revenue Commissioners of any such decision in the form and manner specified by them. As the decision applies to one year only, the rate reverts to the basic rate in the following year unless a resolution is notified.

The Local Property Tax (Local Adjustment Factor) Regulations 2014 set out the process that applies to variation decisions, including the factors that local authorities must consider and the type of public consultation that should be undertaken as part of that process. Guidance has also been issued to local authorities concerning matters relating to these Regulations and is available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/migrated-files/en/Publications/LocalGovernment/Administration/FileDownload%2C38336%2Cen.pdf>

Housing Provision

759. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the Central Mental Hospital site is one of the circa 800 publicly owned sites that are to be made available for the construction of housing as reported in the media (details supplied) earlier in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39275/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): On 27 April 2017, my Department published the Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map, which can be accessed at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-land-map/>.

The map is the result of the collation of data by my Department from local authorities, the Housing Agency, and other State and semi-State bodies. The data sets released to date include details of over 700 local authority and Housing Agency owned sites totalling some 1,700 hectares, as well as 30 sites (200 hectares) owned by State or Semi-State Bodies, the latter in the Greater Dublin Area and other major urban centres, with the potential to deliver homes in the short to medium term.

The site referred to, the Central Mental Hospital in Dundrum, which still operates as an active hospital, was not included in the initial mapping exercise, as published in April.

As the owner of the site, the Office of Public Works (OPW) has primary responsibility for any future plans for its development. My Department will continue to work with all State bodies, including the OPW, to ensure, where appropriate, housing is delivered from State sites that are available for development.

Departmental Staff Data

760. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of persons currently on secondment from a local authority to his department; the length of the secondment in each case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39281/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): There are currently 5 persons on secondment from local authorities as set out in the following table:

Local Authority	Number of Staff	Business Unit	Length of Secondment
Galway County Council	1	Housing Delivery Office	September 2016 to date
Fingal County Council	1	Forward Planning	March 2016 to date
Dublin City Council	1	Fire Services and Emergency Management Directorate	January 2015 to date
Limerick City and County Council	1	Fire Services and Emergency Management Directorate	April 2014 to date
Tipperary County Council	1	Fire Services and Emergency Management Directorate	January 2015 to date
Total	5		

Social and Affordable Housing Data

761. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social houses built by local authorities in each of the years since 2000, in tabular form; the number of units received by each local authority by way of Part V; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39282/17]

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-affordable/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.

Details on the number of units delivered under Part V arrangements are also available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/affordable-housing/affordable-housing-and-part-v-statistics>.

Specific data relating to 2016 social housing output arising from Part V agreements will be available on my Department's website shortly.

Property Tax Administration

762. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the data which was used in arriving at the baseline for LPT in 2014; when the 2014 baseline was amended in 2017; the way in which the changes were calculated; the further calculation being considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39320/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The local government funding model changed considerably in 2014, primarily due to the establishment of Irish Water. Its financial relationship with the local government sector had a considerable impact on local authority financing at that time. In allocating General Purpose Grants (GPG) from the Local Government Fund for 2014, my Department took account of the movement of certain water related activities from Local Authorities to Irish Water. In this context, it was necessary to defer defining a certain proportion of the proceeds of the Local Property Tax (LPT) to be retained in each local authority and the setting of LPT baselines until 2015.

As set out above, local retention of LPT began in 2015 and is now established as an essential source of funding for the local government sector, which reduces reliance on central funding. In accordance with decisions taken by Government regarding the distribution of LPT funding, every local authority has a minimum level of funding available to it known as the LPT baseline. The LPT funding baselines of all local authorities in 2015 and 2016 were at least matched to 2014 GPG funding from the Local Government Fund.

For 2017 onwards, an upward adjustment was made to the LPT baseline of each local authority, to include an additional amount equivalent to the Pension Related Deduction (PRD) income retained by local authorities in 2014. The inclusion of PRD in increased LPT funding

baselines helps protect local authority income in the future. It means that, from 2017 onwards, local authorities will no longer retain PRD locally, thus reversing the previous approach. This was designed to negate the effects of declining PRD income being retained by local authorities from 2016 onwards as a consequence of the implementation of National pay agreements.

My Department works with all local authorities to ensure the local government sector can meet existing and emerging challenges. Matters relating to LPT allocation methods and baselines for future years will be reviewed as necessary and appropriate. All such funding issues have to be considered within the parameters of the national fiscal and budgetary situation and the competing priorities presenting themselves at wider Governmental level.

Residential Tenancies Board Data

763. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of cases undertaken by the RTB in each of the years 2014, 2015 and 2016; the number of those cases resolved by mediation; the number resolved by tribunals; the number of enforcement actions; the number of cases which were referred to the courts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39362/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Details of the numbers and types of cases undertaken by the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB), their enforcement actions and numbers of cases referred to the courts, are available in the RTB Annual Reports which are available on the Board's website at

<http://www.rtb.ie/media-research/publications/annual-reports>.

The Clerk of the Dáil 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 on 20 September 2016 from my Department, the RTB has set up a dedicated email address for this purpose at OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie.

Local Authority Funding

764. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the specific allocation of funding for homelessness services by local authority; the amount self-funded by each local authority; the personnel dedicated to homelessness services by local authority; the changes which have occurred in each year since 2014; the councils which are grouped in regional bands; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39367/17]

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. My Department does not fund any service directly but provides funding to lead housing authorities on a regional basis.

Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities. The purposes for which housing authorities may incur expenditure in addressing homelessness are prescribed in Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988. Under Section 10 funding arrangements, housing authorities must provide at least 10% of the cost of services from their own resources; however authorities may incur additional expenditure outside of the Section 10 funding arrangements. Consequently,

the information sought in the Question regarding the specific amounts allocated for homeless services by local authority and the amount self-funded by each local authority is not available in my Department.

The Section 10 Exchequer funding for the years 2014 - 2016 provided through my Department to housing authorities is set out on a regional basis in the table. A total amount of €97.8 million has been provided for in 2017.

Funding under Section 10 of the Housing Act, 1988

Region	2014	2015	2016
Dublin	€35,322,223	€48,270,201	€68,627,075
Mid-East	€928,489	€1,716,245	€2,746,651
Midland	€649,707	€805,995	€1,109,748
Mid-West	€3,405,060	€3,499,898	€3,500,000
North-East	€879,963	€996,849	€1,493,336
North-West	€348,879	€387,643	€411,946
South-East	€1,818,969	€2,394,619	€3,041,840
South-West	€4,307,772	€5,000,686	€5,375,609
West	€1,544,712	€1,698,834	€2,370,295

With regard to staffing in housing authorities, while my Department gathers quarterly data on staff numbers in local authorities this does not provide the detail sought in relation to homelessness staffing. Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001 it is a matter for each Chief Executive to make the organisational arrangements, including with regard to staffing, necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authorities; in this regard it is a matter for each individual Chief Executive to assign staff to specific functional areas.

Finally, for the purpose of homeless administration there are nine regions, and those regions along with their constituent housing authorities are as follows:

DUBLIN

- Dublin City Council
- Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council
- Fingal County Council
- South Dublin County Council

MID-EAST

- Kildare County Council
- Meath County Council
- Wicklow County Council

MIDLANDS

- Laois County Council
- Longford County Council

- Offaly County Council
- Westmeath County Council

MID-WEST

- Clare County Council
- Limerick City and County Council

NORTH-EAST

- Cavan County Council
- Louth County Council
- Monaghan County Council

NORTH-WEST

- Donegal County Council
- Leitrim County Council
- Sligo County Council

SOUTH-EAST

- Carlow County Council
- Kilkenny County Council
- Tipperary County Council
- Waterford City and County Council
- Wexford County Council

SOUTH-WEST

- Cork City
- Cork County Council
- Kerry County Council

WEST

- Galway City Council
- Galway County Council
- Mayo County Council
- Roscommon County Council

Residential Tenancies Board Data

765. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Gov-

ernment the number of staff directly employed by the RTB; the way in which this compares to each of the years 2014 to 2016; the additional functions which have been added; the resources which were provided with additional functions; the additional resources the RTB sought; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39373/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The RTB currently has 49 staff which include a number of secondees from other civil/public service bodies. The following table sets out staffing numbers from 2014 up to the current position i.e. September 2017:

2014	2015	2016	2017 (September)
31	34	40	49

Demand for the RTB's services has increased significantly due to the increasing size of the rental sector and also because of the changing regulatory structure. Furthermore, a number of additional functions have been added to the remit of the RTB since 2014, including:

- implementation of new Rent Certainty Measures, such as the introduction of Rent Pressure Zones and associated on-going analysis,
- increased engagement with the Approved Housing Body (AHB) Sector,
- integration of Rent Tribunal functions into the RTB,
- introduction of Free Mediation Services,
- operation of a voluntary Landlord Accreditation Scheme,
- establishment of one-person Tribunals,
- increased Education/Awareness and research role, and
- consideration and analysis in respect of a Deposit Protection Scheme.

In relation to its requests for additional resources, the following table sets out recent requests made by the RTB:

Year	Additional Resources Sought	Additional Resources Sanctioned
2014	Sanction requested for 9 additional posts, 5 of which were temporary contract positions.	9 additional posts
2015	Sanction requested for 8 additional posts and to make 5 temporary contract positions permanent positions.	8 additional posts, 5 temporary contract positions were made permanent
2016	Sanction requested for 1 additional post.	1 additional post
2017	Sanction requested for 10.5 additional posts.	10.5 additional posts

The RTB has 13 vacancies at present and recruitment is ongoing in order to fill these vacancies as quickly as possible.

In 2012, the RTB awarded a contract, outsourcing its call-centre activities and the process-

ing of paper registrations. This has allowed the Board to focus on its dispute resolution functions. There are currently 35 people employed on the RTB account by the outsourced service provider.

Social and Affordable Housing Data

766. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social homes that will be completed and ready to be occupied in the south Dublin county area by the end of 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39386/17]

767. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social homes that will be completed and ready to be occupied in the Dublin City Council area by the end of 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39388/17]

768. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social homes that will be completed and ready to be occupied in the Fingal County Council area by the end of 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39387/17]

769. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social homes that will be completed and ready to be occupied in the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council area by the end of 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39389/17]

770. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social homes that will be completed and ready to be occupied in County Wicklow by the end of 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39383/17]

771. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social homes that will be completed and ready to be occupied in County Meath by the end of 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39390/17]

772. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of social homes that will be completed and ready to be occupied in County Kildare by the end of 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39382/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 766 to 772, inclusive, together.

Rebuilding Ireland has put in place the funding resources to accelerate the delivery of social housing for all local authorities. Critically, €5.35 billion in exchequer investment has been secured to support its implementation and to deliver 47,000 social housing units through build, refurbishment, acquisitions and leasing, over the period to 2021. This level of national funding to implement Rebuilding Ireland's targets means that funding is available to all local authorities to advance their housing delivery. 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/refurbishments and a significant proportion of these will involve new construction.

A comprehensive status report 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, delivering 10,000 units, 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 and tenanting, is a matter for the relevant local authority and approved housing body concerned, in the first instance.

Further project approvals are being added to the construction programme as they are developed by local authorities and approved housing bodies, 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.

In addition there are also a range of other social housing delivery methods that are being utilised alongside traditional construction, including harnessing vacant properties, purchasing suitable units from the market, and securing new properties under long-term lease agreements, the Rental Accommodation Scheme and the Housing Assistance Payment, all of which will be used to meet the 21,000 social housing solutions targeted for delivery this year.

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-affordable/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.

Vacant Properties Data

773. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of vacant properties offered by the Housing Agency to the local authorities for purchase, by local authority; the number purchased by each local authority; the number rejected by each local authority; the number under consideration by each local authority; and the reason these properties have been refused, in tabular form. [39400/17]

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.

Local Authority Funding

774. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that 8,657 Dublin City Council homes are awaiting insulation as part of the phase 2 of the insulation programme (details supplied); when it will be confirmed that this funding is available to Dublin #City Council; and if it is not available in 2017, if he will include it in his budget for 2018. [39401/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

Local authorities are currently undertaking an ambitious programme of insulation retrofitting, with the support of my Department, on the least energy efficient social homes. Funding of some €107 million has been provided from 2013 to end-2016 to improve energy efficiency and comfort levels in more than 58,000 local authority homes, benefitting those at risk of fuel poverty and making a significant contribution to Ireland's carbon emissions reduction targets and energy reduction targets for 2020.

The insulation retrofitting programme is being implemented in a number of phases: Phase 1 commenced in 2013 and is focused on providing attic/roof insulation and the less intrusive cavity wall insulation in all relevant properties while Phase 2 of the programme, which has been piloted in both Fingal and Westmeath County Councils, will focus on the external fabric upgrade of those social housing units with solid/hollow block wall construction.

Dublin City Council has completed all Phase 1 works under the Programme, retrofitting over 6,700 units of its social housing stock at a cost of over €12.5m.

Based on the most recent information from local authorities, it is estimated that there are some 18,000 and 19,000 homes requiring Phase 1 and 2 works, respectively. The main focus of the funding available in 2017 is on making significant progress on the completion of the remaining Phase 1 works, with a view to having all Phase 1 works completed by the end of 2018. My Department will consider whether some Phase 2 works can be funded in 2018 for those authorities which have completed Phase 1.

Rental Sector Strategy

775. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will introduce an affordable housing model which will ensure Dublin City Council will be in a position to proceed with the construction of affordable homes on agreed sites in Dublin city. [39402/17]

776. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress which has been made with the introduction of an affordable or cost rental model of housing. [39403/17]

777. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a group was established to explore the introduction of an affordable or cost rental model of housing; and if so, if the group has met and made progress on the matter. [39404/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 775 to 777, inclusive, together.

As signalled previously, the issue of housing affordability is being examined by my Department, in consultation with Dublin City Council, other local authorities and the Housing Agency, in the context of the ongoing review of Rebuilding Ireland. I expect this work to be concluded in the coming weeks and I will be considering the role of new initiatives in that context.

The Strategy for the Rental Sector, published in December 2016, reflecting the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to develop a "cost rental" model for Ireland, taking into account the work already completed in this area, including by the National Economic and Social Council and others, commits my Department to establish and lead an Expert Group to develop a viable 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, par-

ticularly 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. Following the conclusion of the focused review of Rebuilding Ireland, it is my intention to establish this Expert Group in the coming weeks. A proposal regarding its membership and terms of reference is currently being finalised in my Department.

Housing Provision

778. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of vacant houses offered to the Housing Agency and/or his Department to purchase; and the number of those houses offered by banks. [39409/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Agency has been offered 1,700 vacant units for purchase of which 817 have been offered by banks. Within this, the Agency has been offered a total of 1,090 units specifically for its Acquisition Fund, of which 745 have been offered by banks.

Once properties have been offered for consideration, the Agency co-ordinates with local authorities regarding their local social housing requirements. Not all properties offered are deemed suitable. Properties may be physically or financially unsuitable (for example, poor quality dwellings or dwellings above price limits). It should also be noted that properties can be withdrawn during the process by the vendor due to legal or other issues.

As of 31 August 2017, the Agency has had bids accepted on 450 properties. Contracts have been signed for 392 dwellings and 324 of these purchases have closed. Overall, the objective of the Acquisition Fund is to acquire some 1,600 units over the period to 2020 for social housing use.

My Department does not receive offers to purchase vacant houses but rather funds acquisitions in response to applications from local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies.

Rental Accommodation Scheme Data

779. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of RAS tenancies in each local authority area, in tabular form. [39410/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The most recent data regarding the number of tenancies funded under the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) is available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordble/overall-social-housing-provision>.

Social and Affordable Housing

780. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the progress in the Rebuilding Ireland target of rolling or choice-based letting, CBL, in each local authority area; the local authorities that are using CBL; the local authorities that are in the process of installing the system and training staff in its use; and the timeframe for the completion of this work. [39411/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The allocation of social housing support is a matter for the relevant local authority in accordance with the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and associated regulations. Section 22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 requires all housing 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 and to households approved for a transfer, the allocation of which would, in the opinion of the authority, meet the accommodation needs and requirements of the households.

The Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing & Homelessness contains a commitment to extend the use of choice-based letting (CBL) by local authorities as a method of allocating social housing support. This is in recognition of the benefits that a CBL system can deliver to social housing applicants, existing social housing tenants and to local authorities.

On 30th September 2016, the Social Housing Allocation (Amendment) Regulations 2016 were made, which required that all local authorities must, if they have not already done so, provide for CBL as a method of allocation in their housing allocation schemes by 31 December 2016.

Where a local authority, having included a provision on CBL in its allocation scheme, decides to operate a CBL scheme, it must implement it in accordance with Regulations 6-11 of the 2011 Regulations. Decisions on which properties are to be included under a CBL scheme is a matter for individual authorities.

I understand that a majority of local authorities have now used CBL, as a way of allocating some of their social housing properties. Where it has been introduced, the feedback has been very positive both from the authorities themselves and the customers they serve.

To facilitate the wider operation of CBL my Department issued updated guidance to authorities in December 2016. My Department will continue to liaise with housing authorities with a view to ensuring that CBL is implemented, as widely as possible, across the country.

Planning Investigations

781. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 613 of 27 June 2017, if he has received legal advice on the publication of the final report of the review into allegations of planning irregularities in County Donegal; if he is now in a position to publish the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39449/17]

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 and legal advice has been sought in respect of a number of matters, including publication. These initial advices have been received and are now being considered, with a submission currently being

prepared. Arising from this process, a further request for legal advice has been made, seeking clarification on a particular issue.

When this has been received, I will be in a position to consider the matter of publication, and to make a statement as appropriate.

Irish Water Administration

782. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has received a briefing document or proposal from Irish Water for a single public utility or single organisational model; the structures that are proposed; and if he has authorised same. [39524/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Water Services Strategic Plan - A Plan for the Future of Water Services (WSSP), which was published in October 2015, set out strategic objectives for the delivery of water services for 25 years up to 2040. The WSSP committed to the preparation of Business Plans by Irish Water to set out targets for delivery of efficiencies in operational and capital expenditure and performance targets consistent with the delivery of the objectives of the WSSP.

The Irish Water Business Plan - Transforming Water Services in Ireland to 2021 was published in late 2015. It set the priorities for the utility to 2021 and underpins the transformation plan for the water sector to a single utility model. The plan was considered by Government and was approved subject to budgetary and regulatory review.

The Confidence and Supply Arrangement in support of the minority Government has confirmed the retention of Irish Water as a single national utility in public ownership responsible for the delivery of water and waste water services.

Since 2013, working through Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with the Local Authorities, Irish Water has made significant progress in establishing the utility capability, which has included investing over €2 billion in the system to date. Over the past year, significant design phase work has been undertaken on the development of a transformation plan, in line with the Business Plan objectives. Flowing from this, I have been informed by Ervia (which has responsibility for Irish Water), that they consider that the public water system will benefit significantly by greater integration of operations into the single utility. Consequently, the Ervia Board has agreed in principle not to renew the SLAs beyond 2025 (when they are due to end) and to move to a full integrated public utility operations model. The Water Services Acts already provide the necessary protections for terms and conditions, and pensions of local authority staff working under the SLAs in such circumstances. It is the intention of Ervia to work with local authorities to manage this change within the life of the current Business Plan (i.e. by end of 2021).

A process of engagement with local authorities on the proposed next steps on the transformation plan has now commenced. The current SLAs remain in place until such time as an alternative is agreed.

Irish Water Expenditure

783. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount which has been paid to a company (details supplied) for staff in each of the years 2014 to 2016. [39525/17]

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. Contracts entered into by Irish Water are a matter for the utility and I have no function in the matter.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email at oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Local Authority Staff Remuneration

784. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount which has been paid to local authority staff in each of the years 2014 to 2016. [39526/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The total Gross Cash Remuneration (before taxation) for the local government sector, which comprises wages, salaries, allowances in the nature of pay, overtime or any other payments and employers contribution to social security but excludes employees contribution to superannuation, is outlined in the following table.

Year	Amount in €millions
2014	€1,293.9
2015	€1,283.8
2016	€1,308.8

Irish Water Expenditure

785. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount which has been paid to consultants since Irish Water was established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39527/17]

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. Consultants engaged by Irish Water are a matter for the utility and I have no function in the matter.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email at oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Irish Water Expenditure

786. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount which has been paid to Irish Water staff in bonus payments in each of the past three years. [39528/17]

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. Payments to staff by Irish

Water are a matter for the utility and I have no function in the matter.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email at oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Irish Water Expenditure

787. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of rent Irish Water paid for its offices in each of the past three years. [39529/17]

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. Rent payments made by Irish Water are a matter for the utility and I have no function in the matter.

Irish Water Financial Statements have a breakdown of operational costs including an amount for the cost of rent, rates, utilities and insurance. The Financial Statements are laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas. In order to get a further breakdown of operational costs the Deputy may wish to contact the dedicated team established by Irish Water 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 Authority Expenditure

788. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the operational expenditure and capital expenditure costs to councils in the past three years. [39530/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Current expenditure (sometimes referred to as revenue expenditure) covers the service provision costs of local authorities, including staff salaries, housing maintenance, pensions, etc. Current expenditure is funded through a combination of commercial rates, charges for goods and services, specific Government grants, and Local Property Tax.

Capital expenditure results in the creation or acquisition by a local authority of an asset that has a use beyond the year in which it is provided e.g. road construction, building or purchase of houses, swimming pools, libraries, etc. Capital expenditure is funded through a combination of Government grants, borrowings and income from other sources.

An amalgamated Annual Financial Statement for the local government sector is prepared and published by my Department following the receipt of the audited annual financial statements of the local authorities. This document sets out the results for all of the local authorities under a number of revenue and capital headings and is published on the Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/search/archived/archived/archived/current/type/publications?query=Local%20Authority%20Financial%20Statement>.

Total local authority Current and Capital expenditure over the years 2013-2015 (the most recent year for which complete audited figures are available) are set out in the following table.

-	2013 €m	2014 €m	2015 €m
Current	4,524	3,881	3,962
Capital	1,511	1,070	1,315
Total	6,035	4,951	5,277

Irish Water Staff

789. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of staff in the Irish Water Cork call centre; the number of staff in Irish Water and the local authorities both temporary and permanent for the past three years. [39539/17]

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. Irish Water staffing is a matter for the utility and I have no function in the matter.

Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email at oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Local Authority Staff Recruitment

790. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the length of time the position of Galway county manager has been vacant; the reason the position has not been filled; when it is expected that the position will be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39541/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Following the retirement of the most recent permanent Chief Executive of Galway County Council, in line with section 145(6) of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended, the then Minister with responsibility for local government, appointed a Temporary Chief Executive to the post. This temporary appointment commenced on 05 July 2014. A permanent appointment has not yet been made.

The position of Chief Executive of Galway County Council will be considered in the context of a report that will be brought to Government in the coming weeks pursuant to the Programme for a Partnership Government commitment on potential measures to boost local government leadership, accountability and ensure that local government structures strengthen local democracy. This will take account also of the recommendations of the committee established to examine local government arrangements in Galway.

Local Authority Staff Data

791. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the detail of current vacancies including grade and area in Galway county council; the length of time of each vacancy; the reason for the vacancies; when it is expected the positions will be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39542/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department gathers quarterly data on staff numbers in local authorities. The data gathered does

not provide the detail the Deputy is looking for in terms of vacancies within Galway County Council.

Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for the staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authorities for which he or she is responsible. In this regard, it is a matter for each individual Chief Executive to recruit and assign staff to specific functional areas.

My Department currently has five staff sanction requests from Galway County Council, which are currently under consideration. These sanction requests all relate to posts within the Galway library service.

Pyrite Resolution Board Data

792. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of appeals under the exceptional circumstances clause that have been granted by the Pyrite Remediation Board since its inception; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39556/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The Pyrite Resolution Act 2013 provides for the making of a pyrite remediation scheme by the Pyrite Resolution Board for certain dwellings affected by significant pyrite damage. The Pyrite Resolution Board, with the support of the Housing Agency, is responsible for the implementation of the pyrite remediation scheme. The pyrite remediation scheme is a scheme of “last resort” and is limited in its application and scope. The full conditions for eligibility under the scheme are set out in the scheme which is available on the Board’s website, www.pyriteboard.ie.

The scheme is applicable to dwellings which are subject to significant damage attributable to pyritic heave established in accordance with I.S. 398-1:2013 - Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material - Part 1: Testing and categorisation protocol. In this regard, it is a condition of eligibility under the scheme that an application to the Board must be accompanied by a Building Condition Assessment with a Damage Condition Rating of 2. Dwellings which do not have a Damage Condition Rating of 2 are not eligible to apply under the scheme. This ensures that, having regard to available resources, the focus of the scheme is on dwellings which are most severely damaged by pyritic heave.

Where a dwelling, otherwise not eligible for inclusion in the scheme, adjoins a dwelling already included in the scheme, such a dwelling may be considered in accordance with the exceptional circumstance provisions set out in section 17 of the Act. Section 17 provides that exceptional circumstances may apply where -

- failure to include a dwelling in the scheme may result in damage to that dwelling or damage to the dwelling being remediated under the scheme, or
- pyrite remediation work is causing or may cause damage to a dwelling.

The Housing Agency will consider if exceptional circumstances apply when the Remedial Works Plan is being drawn up; the Board will be informed of any recommendation for a decision in the matter. As matters currently stand, no dwellings have been included in the pyrite remediation scheme under the exceptional circumstances provisions of the Act.

Housing Assistance Payment

793. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the maximum amount a person in receipt of HAP is allowed to contribute towards rent; if this is stated in the legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39573/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the Housing Assistance Payment scheme (HAP), a tenant sources their own accommodation, the tenancy agreement is between the tenant and the landlord and is covered by the Residential Tenancy Act 2004 (as amended). The accommodation sourced should be within the limits of the prescribed maximum HAP rent limits, which are based on the household size and the rental market within that area. HAP applicants are informed of the maximum rent limits for their local authority area; these elements of the scheme are stated in the HAP Tenant Information Booklet, on the dedicated HAP website, www.hap.ie, and local authority staff are expected to explain them to each HAP applicant.

Recognising the pressures in the rental market, the Government increased the maximum rent limits available under the HAP scheme 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% (enhanced support under the Homeless HAP scheme is statutorily provided for in the Dublin Region) 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 available data, at the end of Q2 2017, 17.8% of the total number of households being supported by HAP were benefitting 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 benefitting from the additional flexibility.

My Department is aware that some HAP recipients are making payments directly to their landlords, beyond the amount of HAP being paid on their behalf. There is no legislative provision precluding HAP supported households contributing towards the monthly rent to their landlord. Where a qualified household sources accommodation outside the maximum rent limits, it is important to highlight the responsibility falling on the household to ensure the landlord receives the full amount of rent charged for the property as set out in their tenancy agreement. In cases where the tenancy would clearly not be sustainable, local authorities have been advised to refuse HAP support for the accommodation sourced. It is also important to remember that households in receipt of HAP support can work full-time without losing their housing support, which is not the case for Rent Supplement recipients.

Ultimately, decisions in relation to levels of HAP support made available to individual households are a matter for the local authority concerned. Equally local authorities must assess the sustainability of each tenancy where a tenant proposes making additional payment beyond the HAP Payment to the landlord. The increased flexibility provided to local authorities offers them, as housing authorities, more capacity to assist households in securing rented accommodation that meets their needs. Currently over 27,000 households are having their housing needs met via HAP.

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.

Water Charges

794. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a person must pay their water bill in order to purchase a local authority house through the incremental purchase scheme, in view of the fact that refunds are now being issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39580/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The current position is that, pending any legislative change, arrears of water charges incurred by households remain to be discharged before the sale of a dwelling. Under Section 3(A)(9) of the Water Services Act 2014 (inserted by Section 48 of the Environment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2015) a person who is a tenant of a dwelling let to him under the Housing Acts 1966 to 2014 and who proposes to purchase the dwelling shall before completion of the sale provide the local authority concerned with a certificate of discharge from Irish Water confirming that any charge under section 21 of the No. 2 Act 2013 in respect of the dwelling owed to Irish Water has been paid. The sale of the dwelling cannot proceed until a certificate of discharge in respect of the dwelling has been received from Irish Water.

In line with the Water Services (Amendment) Act 2016, domestic water charges are suspended from 1 July 2016 to the end of 2017. However, Irish Water domestic customers remain liable for any water charges (and late payment charges) in respect of the period prior to this suspension, i.e. from 1 January 2015 to the 30 June 2016.

Following approval by the Government, the Water Services Bill 2017 will be published shortly. The Bill reflects the recommendations of the report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services. This report, published on 12 April 2017, was approved by both Houses of the Oireachtas. The Bill provides for the discontinuance of domestic water charges for dwellings as set out in the Water Services Act 2014, including the repeal of section 3(A) of that Act. Pending the passage of the Bill, the current legislative framework remains in place and tenants who propose to purchase a property under the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme must provide a certificate of discharge from Irish Water confirming charges up to 30 June 2016 have been paid.

Shared Ownership Scheme

795. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of shared ownership loans and first-time buyer's loans in each local authority issued since these schemes came into existence, in tabular form; the number of each category currently in mortgage arrears of less than and more than 90 days; the number of properties repossessed as a result of mortgage arrears; the number of properties that were voluntarily sold; the value of these mortgages; and the value of the arrears on these mortgages. [39672/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): 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. The attached table gives a breakdown of outstanding Shared Ownership loans by local authority at the end of Q1 2017.

Table 1: Shared Ownership Loans by Local Authority Area at end Q1 2017

Local Authority	Total
Carlow County Council	28
Cavan County Council	25
Clare County Council	113
Cork City Council	70
Cork County Council	405
DLR County Council	70
Donegal County Council	149
Dublin City Council	858
Fingal County Council	176
Galway City Council	15
Galway County Council	47
Kerry County Council	65
Kildare County Council	295
Kilkenny County Council	87
Laois County Council	200
Leitrim County Council	3
Limerick City and County Council	114
Longford County Council	35
Louth County Council	11
Mayo County Council	26
Meath County Council	61
Monaghan County Council	21
Offaly County Council	18
Roscommon County Council	12
Sligo County Council	100
South Dublin County Council	121
Tipperary County Council	102
Waterford City and County Council	209
Westmeath County Council	65
Wexford County Council	33
Wicklow County Council	51
Grand Total	3585

To ensure effective targeting of limited resources, local authority house purchase loan finance, including finance advanced in the past for the purchase of properties under the Shared Ownership Scheme, is targeted at first time buyers only.

The information requested in relation to loans advanced by each local authority, local authority mortgage arrears and local authority repossessions (both forced and voluntary) is available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity>. This data is not broken down by loan type.

Planning Issues

796. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which persons will be able to view documents, drawings, maps and submissions on planning applications for 100 units or more that will be considered by An Bord Pleanála under the strategic housing development planning applications either by hard copy and or online; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39713/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Planning and Development (Strategic Housing Development) Regulations 2017 (the Regulations) set out procedural and administrative matters relating to proposed strategic housing developments, as provided for under Chapter 1 of Part 2 of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016.

Article 301 of the Regulations details the requirements for making an application for a strategic housing development available for public inspection. It states that a copy of the application, including any environmental impact statement or Natura impact statement or both of those statements, if required, and all other documents, particulars, plans or information that accompany the application, will be made available for inspection at the offices of An Bord Pleanála (the Board) and in the relevant planning authority(s), from when the application is made and for a period of 8 weeks following the Board's decision on the application. In addition, the applicant is also required to make the application available for inspection on-line on a website for the same period.

Article 302 of the Regulations provides that submissions or observations in relation to a proposed strategic housing development may be made by members of the public and prescribed bodies to the Board during a 5-week public consultation period, commencing from the receipt by the Board of the application. The Board is also required to send a copy of any submissions or observations received to the relevant planning authority.

In accordance with standard practice relating to planning applications, the submissions and observations received on proposed strategic housing developments are associated with the related planning file and are available for inspection at the offices of the Board and the relevant planning authority.

Approved Housing Bodies

797. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the policy on private tenants in situ in apartments that have been bought by a voluntary housing body when those tenants are entitled to HAP; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39728/17]

798. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the rights of a private tenant that is eligible for housing and HAP and who lives in a property that has been bought by a voluntary housing body but is not paying differential rent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39729/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 797 and 798 together.

The Residential Tenancies Act 2004 regulates the landlord-tenant relationship in the private rented sector and sets out the rights and obligations of landlords and tenants. The Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2015 amended section 3 of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 so that dwellings let by Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to social housing tenants now come within the remit of the Act. Tenants in HAP supported tenancies and AHB tenancies are af-

forded the same rights and protections available to all those in private rented tenancies, with some minor exceptions in relation to rent setting and reviews for AHB tenancies.

In a case where an Approved Housing Body (AHB) purchases apartments that have tenants in situ who are qualified for social housing support and are on the record of qualified households, it is a matter for the individual local authority as to whether such apartments should be allocated to the tenants in question in accordance with its social housing allocations scheme.

Local authorities are by law (Section 63(1) of the Local Government Act 2001) independent in the performance of their functions. 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.

Where social housing units are provided by AHBs under Payment and Availability (P&A) arrangements with local authorities, it is a condition of such funding that rents be determined in accordance with the differential rents scheme of the local authority in which the dwelling is situated, and AHBs will carry out rent reviews from time to time in accordance with the particular rents scheme in question.

Where sheltered housing is provided by AHBs under the Capital Assistance Scheme, my Department's guidance states that rents should be at levels which are reasonable having regard to tenant's incomes and the outlay of the AHB on the accommodation.

Water Services Infrastructure

799. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the proposed figures for investment in repairing and upgrading the water infrastructure over the coming three years. [39783/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Irish Water Business Plan 2014-2021 forecasts €5.5 billion in capital expenditure over the period. It is anticipated that €2.2 billion will be spent by the end of 2017, leaving some €3.3 billion to be invested to the end of the Plan period. The Commission for Energy Regulation has approved the capital spending for the current regulatory period to end 2018 and the 2019-2021 regulatory period 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.

Water Services Expenditure

800. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the estimated cost in 2018 to reduce leakages in water infrastructure from current levels to 25%. [39784/17]

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.

If Deputies have any queries on specific issues in relation to water services, they may be aware that Irish Water has established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. The team can be contacted via email to oireachtasmembers@water.ie or by telephone on a dedicated number, 1890 578 578.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Administration

801. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the proposed changes to the mortgage to rent scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39796/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Review of the Mortgage to Rent (MTR) Scheme, published on 8 February 2017, introduced a range of amendments to the eligibility criteria and administration of the MTR scheme in order for it to work better for borrowers. My Department and the Housing Agency are working with all stakeholders to ensure that the actions set out in the Review are being effectively implemented to benefit a greater number of households.

The Review also concluded that the current financial model of the MTR scheme may not, in its current configuration, be capable of delivering the scale of successful cases that could benefit from the scheme over time. In order to test the operability of alternative funding models for the scheme, the Housing Agency has been working with a number of financial entities who have expressed an interest in working with the MTR scheme to progress a number of alternative long-term lease arrangements. In advance of these pilots and to establish the operability of an alternative financing approach, a targeted market testing exercise has been undertaken by the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA), to test the suitability of the proposed enhanced leasing arrangement to ascertain if they would be viable for a MTR cohort taking account of the necessity to provide a long-term stable solution for eligible households.

The responses to the market testing exercise have been reviewed by the Housing Agency and my Department and the next step is to issue a formal call for Expressions of Interest from bodies interested in pursuing pilot operating models. Once the Expressions of Interest process is concluded, the Housing Agency will make recommendations to the Department as to the make-up of the pilots which can then be initiated. The drafting of the content of the Expressions of Interest Request is underway and is expected to issue in the coming weeks.

Commercial Rates Exemptions

802. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the funding which will be given to local authorities in 2018 in lieu of the loss of commercial rates from Irish Water properties; and the funding given in 2016. [39840/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 12 of the Water Services Act 2014 states that public water services property is not rateable for the purposes of the Valuation Act 2001. This exemption applies to Irish Water for the provision of water supply and waste water treatment. Government provides equivalent funding directly to local authorities, through the Local Government Fund, in respect of rates income foregone.

Local authorities have been compensated to the amount of over €46m in 2016 in respect of rates income foregone in respect of Irish Water’s infrastructure. A breakdown of the amounts

paid to local authorities in 2016 is set out in the following table. A similar provision is being made available in 2017 and an equivalent provision is expected to be made available to local authorities in 2018, subject to the normal budgetary process.

Local Authority	2016 €'000
Carlow County Council	49
Cavan County Council	30
Clare County Council	165
Cork City Council	712
Cork County Council	1,544
Donegal County Council	357
Dublin City Council	14,052
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown	3,334
Fingal County Council	5,249
Galway City Council	102
Galway County Council	35
Kerry County Council	256
Kildare County Council	2,571
Kilkenny County Council	23
Laois County Council	77
Leitrim County Council	22
Limerick City and County Council	1,988
Longford County Council	78
Louth County Council	586
Mayo County Council	201
Meath County Council	308
Monaghan County Council	11
Offaly County Council	Nil
Roscommon County Council	Nil
Sligo County Council	132
South Dublin County Council	6,852
Tipperary County Council	427
Waterford City and County Council	4,479
Westmeath County Council	69
Wexford County Council	129
Wicklow County Council	2,182
Total	46,020

Fire Stations Provision

803. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of a project (details supplied); when this project will proceed to the next stage; the timeframe for the project to reach tender and construction stages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39899/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): A five-year Fire Services Capital Programme is currently under-

way within my Department. This has 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. Under this programme, the list of priority projects to be progressed will be kept under review on an annual basis.

Ballybay is included under the 2016 - 2020 Capital Programme as a new build station project to be included in annual reviews. My Department requested a revised cost plan for the proposed project in July. On receipt of same my Department will consider the project further.

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.

Housing Estates

804. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the level of funding provided to local authorities for taking in charge housing estates in 2016 and 2017; if funds are expected to be available under this heading in 2018; the funding provided in 2016 and 2017 by local authority; the number of housing estates that are covered by this funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39900/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The taking-in-charge of housing estates is a matter for the relevant local authority. In an attempt to enhance learning and systems development and to accelerate the taking-in-charge process of housing estates, my Department launched the National Taking-in-Charge Initiative (NTICI) in April 2016. The Initiative was set up on a time-bound basis in order to both better understand and stimulate the taking-in-charge process, due to the backlog of estates waiting to be taken in charge.

The NTICI was underpinned by €10m in funding. Under the terms of the NTICI, developments subject to valid taking-in-charge applications were eligible for inclusion in the call for funding proposals. Of the funding allocated, €7.7 million was paid to local authorities in respect of 330 developments, containing some 13,400 units.

It is important to note that the NTICI was not intended to establish a rolling annual funding programme to take-in-charge all estates not yet taken-in-charge, but was instead intended to develop better knowledge and systems to support the taking-in-charge of further estates over time. Therefore, there is no corresponding funding line after 2016.

A report on the 2016 NTICI Programme is currently being finalised by my Department which will include findings and recommendations on sustaining progress on the taking-in-charge issue, and will help to inform future taking-in-charge plans.

The funding provided in 2016 for each local authority is indicated below:

Local Authority	No. of estates	Total number of units	Total monies paid out
CARLOW	8	247	€189,393.50
CAVAN	23	891	€151,354.15
CLARE	12	230	€437,114.00
CORK COUNTY	15	658	€387,405.52

Local Authority	No. of estates	Total number of units	Total monies paid out
CORK CITY	3	197	€124,969.86
DLR	0	0	€0.00
DONEGAL	39	1,774	€825,903.86
Dublin City	0	0	€0.00
FINGAL	7	868	€200,853.50
Galway CITY	2	16	€19,691.43
GALWAY COUNTY	21	980	€382,721.10
KERRY	18	666	€362,652.00
KILDARE	6	365	€166,161.49
KILKENNY	9	694	€229,900.00
LAOIS	5	165	€141,873.30
LEITRIM	9	188	€151,950.00
LIMERICK	6	383	€268,500.00
LONGFORD	12	487	€163,500.00
LOUTH	0	0	€0.00
MAYO	11	340	€336,234.00
MEATH	6	300	€169,659.00
MONAGHAN	12	211	€111,170.00
OFFALY	21	673	€320,280.00
ROSCOMMON	9	157	€224,468.00
SDCC	1	745	€30,000.00
SLIGO	12	272	€252,911.98
TIPPERARY	13	311	€521,296.40
WATERFORD	10	544	€141,896.00
WESTMEATH	5	53	€210,130.00
WEXFORD	29	817	€887,819.85
WICKLOW	6	155	€290,192.00
	330	13,387	€7,700,000.94

NOTE : Dublin City, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown and Louth County Councils did not avail of NTICI funding.

Unfinished Housing Developments

805. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the level of funding provided to local authorities for unfinished housing estates in 2016 and 2017; if funds are expected to be available under this heading in 2018; the funding provided in 2016 and 2017 by local authority; the number of housing estates that are covered by this funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39901/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): There was no direct funding provided by my Department towards unfinished housing estates in 2016 and 2017. The 2016 Annual Progress Report on Unfinished Housing Developments, published in March 2017, highlighted that the number of ‘unfinished’ developments had reduced

by over 85% from just under 3,000 developments in 2010 to 420 developments in 2016. Funding of the resolution process is now centred around investment by housing providers and their funders as well as income from bonds and securities.

The 2016 report is available at the following link:

http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/resolving_unfinished_housing_developments_-_2016_annual_progress_report.pdf.

The residual level of unfinished housing developments remaining is expected to show further reduction when the 2017 survey is finalised and the 2017 Annual Progress Report is published by year end.

Local Authority Housing Funding

806. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the funding allocated to date in 2017 to Cavan County Council for the housing capital programme; the additional funding that will be made available before the end of 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39909/17]

807. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the funding allocated to date in 2017 to Monaghan County Council for the housing capital programme; the additional funding that will be made available before the end of 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39910/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 806 and 807 together.

Rebuilding Ireland has put in place both the targets and the funding resources to accelerate the delivery of social housing for all local authorities, including Cavan and Monaghan County Councils. There are currently over 600 social housing construction projects included in the Status Report on Social Housing Construction Projects, which is now published on a quarterly basis and includes projects that are recently completed, on site, or undergoing planning and design. This list is being added to on an ongoing basis and the most recent report, covering the period to end Quarter 1 of 2017, is available at the following link:

<http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/social-housing-construction-projects-report-2017/>.

The report covering the period to the end of quarter 2 of 2017 will be published shortly.

The Status Report includes 16 construction projects of various scale in Counties Cavan and Monaghan, involving 226 new social homes, one of which was completed in Quarter 4 of 2016 and four others that are currently on site. Funding is provided to local authorities in line with their advancement of projects through construction. Accordingly, the level of funding that will be provided in 2017 to Cavan and Monaghan County Councils for their social housing delivery activity will be directly linked to the scale of delivery they achieve on these projects.

So far this year my Department has provided funding amounting to almost €3.8 million to both local authorities to advance their social housing construction programme including delivery by approved housing bodies under both the Capital Assistance Scheme and the Capital Advance Leasing Facility. I am keen that both local authorities bring forward and advance projects as speedily as possible and they have been assured that funding is in place to support their activity in this regard.

In tandem with the construction programme, all local authorities have been undertaking the targeted acquisition of properties and since January 2017, my Department has provided over €1.7 million to Cavan County Council and over €2.6 million to Monaghan County Council for this purpose, through which the two local authorities have secured 15 and 11 new properties for social housing use, respectively.

My Department also provides funding to local authorities for a range of social housing stock improvement initiatives, such as the energy efficiency retrofitting programme, adaptations to houses for people with a disability and the elderly, and returning vacant properties to productive use. Allocations for 2017 in respect of these programmes are as follows:

2017	Voids allocation	Energy efficiency	DPG/IWIL (Combined local and national funding)
Cavan	€221,950	€293,080	€353,709
Monaghan	€182,000	€2,600*	€175,854

*This allocation is based on a return received from the LA outlining works proposed for the year and associated costs.

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

808. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the review of income eligibility limits for social housing has commenced; the date for completion of the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39911/17]

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.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Administration

809. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when an amended mortgage to rent scheme will become operational; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [39912/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Review of the Mortgage to Rent (MTR) Scheme, published on 8 February 2017, introduced a range of amendments to the eligibility criteria and administration of the MTR scheme in order for it to work better for borrowers. My Department and the Housing Agency are working with all stakeholders to ensure that the actions set out in the Review are being effectively implemented to benefit a greater number of households.

The Review also concluded that the current financial model of the MTR scheme may not, in its current configuration, be capable of delivering the scale of successful cases that could benefit from the scheme over time. In order to test the operability of alternative funding models for the scheme, the Housing Agency has been working with a number of financial entities who have expressed an interest in working with the MTR scheme to progress a number of alternative long-term lease arrangements. In advance of these pilots and to establish the operability of an alternative financing approach, a targeted market testing exercise has been undertaken by the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA), to test the suitability of the proposed enhanced leasing arrangement to ascertain if they would be viable for a MTR cohort taking account of the necessity to provide a long-term stable solution for eligible households.

The responses to the market testing exercise have been reviewed by the Housing Agency and my Department and the next step is to issue a formal call for Expressions of Interest from bodies interested in pursuing pilot operating models. Once the Expressions of Interest process is concluded, the Housing Agency will make recommendations to my Department as to the make-up of the pilots, which can then be initiated. The drafting of the content of the Expressions of Interest Request is underway and is expected to issue in the coming weeks.

Defence Forces Properties

810. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if his attention has been drawn to the fact that dangerous chemicals such as ardrox 666 were disposed of for the Air Corps by a company that collected and disposed of all such highly toxic, corrosive and carcinogenic chemicals; and if the amount of chemicals purchased corresponds with the amount sent for safe disposal by the company engaged by the Air Corps to carry out such work in the past 20 years. [39259/17]

811. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if his attention has been drawn to the fact that dangerous chemicals were over the years in a systematic fashion leached into the soil on lands at Casement Aerodrome, Baldonnel; if soil and or ground water samples have been taken on the 600 acre site at Baldonnel during the past 20 years; if so, the results of those tests; the action taken to prevent this practice; if decontamination of the soil occurred; and if such practice has now ended. [39260/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 810 and 811 together.

As this matter pertains to litigation which is ongoing, it would be inappropriate for me to comment at this time.

Defence Forces

812. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the LÉ Samuel Beckett has embarked on a trip to London to attend an arms fair (details supplied); if so, the purpose of this trip; the body funding it; the name of the person that proposed and approved the Naval Service's attendance at this event; his views on whether it is appropriate that a navy ship from a neutral country attend an international arms fair; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39322/17]

813. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of Defence Forces personnel and Department staff that are attending the defence and security equipment conference in London; the cost of attending this event for members of the Defence Forces and Department staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39334/17]

814. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if Naval Service ships are present at the defence and security equipment conference in London; if so, the cost of the attendance; the duties which have not been carried out while the ship has been present in London; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39335/17]

815. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the purpose for which the Naval Service vessel, the LÉ Samuel Beckett is attending an international arms fair in London; the other members of the Defence Forces attending this arms fair; if the exchequer is funding this excursion; if so, the cost; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39434/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 812 to 815, inclusive, together.

A Naval Service vessel, *LÉ Samuel Beckett*, attended the bi-annual Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) exhibition in London last week. The event ran from Tuesday 12th September 2017 to Friday 15th September 2017. The visit of the ship followed a request from Babcock International, the company responsible for the build of *LÉ Samuel Beckett* and her sister ships in the Naval Service fleet, *LÉ James Joyce* and *LÉ William Butler Yeats*. Babcock International is currently in the middle of building a 4th sister Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) for the Irish Naval Service which is due for delivery in 2018. This ship is to be named *LÉ George Bernard Shaw*.

The attendance of *LÉ Samuel Beckett* at the exhibition was an opportunity to portray, to a wide audience, the considerable level of commitment and investment made in recent years towards protecting and safeguarding Irish territorial waters, by showcasing the success of the Offshore Patrol Vessel design and build capabilities. This design and build process for the current OPVs has involved a long and cooperative contractual relationship with the Department of Defence and the Naval Service with Babcock International's Appledore shipbuilding facility in Devon in the UK. *LÉ Róisín* and *LÉ Niamh* were also built in the same shipyard, some fifteen or more years ago. Given the Department's and the Naval Service's involvement with the company during the course of the shipbuilding contracts, I approved a positive recommendation from my Department for the attendance of the ship.

It is not considered that the attendance of the ship at the event compromised our neutrality in any manner. In that regard, it is clearly understood that Ireland will continue to maintain a policy of military neutrality characterised by non-membership of military alliances and non-participation in common or mutual defence arrangements.

No additional advantage or benefit was received by the Naval Service or the Department of Defence, and no additional costs arose to the Defence Organisation as a result of the attendance of the ship at the exhibition.

In addition to the attendance of *LÉ Samuel Beckett*, the event was attended by a number of Department of Defence and Defence Forces personnel. This is standard practice within the Defence Organisation and attendance of personnel has been a feature at previous exhibitions. It is best practice in Defence acquisition to carry out product and services research at major shows of this nature. The estimated cost of travel and subsistence for the attendance of these personnel is €4,500.

The purpose was to visit the many exhibition stands involving the wide range of companies that the Defence Organisation deals with on a regular basis. These include companies involved in the land, sea and air environments, all of which are of interest to the Defence Organisation given the various roles of the Defence Forces at home and overseas. It was also an opportunity to visit the stands of several Irish companies exhibiting.

The exhibition provided personnel with a valuable opportunity to meet key suppliers across the full spectrum of military and defence equipment and activities. This ties in to the primary purpose for the procurement of such defensive equipment by the Department of Defence which is to enhance the capability of the Defence Forces. Attendance at such events is necessary to ensure that the Defence Forces retain the capabilities to fulfil all roles assigned by Government both at home and overseas.

Commemorative Medals

816. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the date on which commemorative medals will be issued to the surviving veterans of the siege of Jadotville and family members of those since deceased; if he will liaise with the organisers of the annual Jadotville day commemoration that will take place in Athlone, County Westmeath on 21 October 2017 to try and ensure that the medals are presented on that day of celebration to minimise the travel and inconvenience to the elderly veterans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39680/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): On the 13th June last I decided to award a medal to the men of “A” Company, 35th Infantry Battalion and to family representatives of deceased members, to give full and due recognition in honour of the courageous actions of the men during the siege at Jadotville in September 1961. This fully recognises their bravery and courage during the unique circumstances of the Siege of Jadotville.

A working group comprising civil and military officials has been established to co-ordinate efforts required to implement the plans for a medal ceremony. It has been agreed that the event will take place in Custume Barracks, Athlone where “A” Company assembled in advance of their deployment to the Congo.

Consideration is being given to suitable dates for this event and that includes liaison regarding local events taking place in Athlone. The design and procurement process of the medals is the other main factor impacting on finalising a date for the ceremony. As the delivery of the medals cannot be guaranteed in advance of 21st October 2017, unfortunately the medal ceremony cannot take place on that date. The Department are actively considering other suitable dates.

Defence Forces Properties

817. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if the

20 September 2017

State Claims Agency has been tasked with taking health and safety risk assessments at Case-ment Aerodrome, Baldonnell; the date on which these assessments commenced; if they are still ongoing; the findings of these health and risk assessments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [39834/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I am advised that the State Claims Agency do not undertake health and safety risk assessments in the Defence Forces. This function is the responsibility of the Defence Forces.

With regard to the Air Corps, the Deputy will be aware that the Health and Safety Authority (HSA), following a number of inspections in 2016, issued a Report of Inspection to the Air Corps on 21 October 2016, listing a number of matters requiring attention which included the areas of risk assessment.

The Air Corps as a consequence of this HSA report have implemented an improvement plan which is being conducted over eight phases. Seven of the eight phases have now been fully completed. The final phase is a continuous ongoing process. The implementation plan focuses on a number of areas, including risk assessments.