

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 6, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 7 to 14, inclusive, resubmitted.

Question No. 15 answered orally.

Questions Nos. 16 to 28, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 29 to 37, inclusive, answered orally.

Child Care Services

38. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on dramatically reducing the cost of child care to parents while also increasing wages of workers in the child care sector; the steps she will take to achieve this; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43757/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The cost of childcare continues to be a major issue facing parents in Ireland. We remain the most expensive in the OECD. To alleviate some of this financial burden, I introduced a range of supports in September to make childcare more affordable for families, including a new universal subsidy for all children aged between 6 months and 3 years of age, or until they are eligible for ECCE. This amounts to as much as €80 a month or €1,040 per year for children in full time childcare. In addition, subsidies provided under existing childcare schemes, specifically the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) and Training and Employment Childcare (TEC) Schemes have been increased significantly, in some cases by as much as 50%. Eligible parents can access as much as €7,500 per child per year under the CCS. The full second year of ECCE will also assist parents somewhat from September 2018.

In addition to measures aimed at affordability I am also seeking to address issues relating to quality service provision. I increased ECCE capitation by 7%, the first increase since ECCE was introduced in 2010. I also secured a total of €18 million for 'programme support payments' for service providers to assist them with the administrative burden of delivering the various childcare schemes.

I am acutely aware that pay and conditions for the Early Years workforce are highly inadequate. In this regard I am conscious of the fact that while my Department is not the employer of Childcare professionals, it is a major funder and I will be supportive of efforts made by the sector to move this issue forward possibly by a Sectoral Employment Order with the Labour Court.

I am pleased that the 'Independent Review of the Cost of Delivering Quality Childcare' has been commissioned by my Department, Crowe Howarth will soon begin to examine the costs faced by childcare providers in delivering quality childcare. This will include a survey of childcare providers. Following completion, the review is intended to be used to strengthen the evidence base underpinning future policy development and investment in early years. It will feed into future policy development that will address both the cost of childcare for parents and the quality of service delivery which is greatly affected by the terms and conditions of the workforce.

Child and Family Agency Data

39. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of referrals made to Tusla across all abuse categories in each of the years 2011 to 2016; the procedures that are followed following a referral to Tusla; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43445/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In 2016 there was a total of 47,630 referrals made to Tusla. Following Tusla's initial review of each referral, just over 19,000 were deemed to be a concern about abuse. These referrals relate to physical, emotional, sexual abuse and neglect, and multiple referrals can relate to the same child.

Last year, thirty-six per cent of referrals were for emotional abuse, sixteen per cent for sexual abuse, twenty-three per cent for physical abuse and twenty-five per cent related to neglect. The Table of referrals for 2011-2016 is included for circulation in the text of my answer. This shows an increase in total referrals from 2011 to 2016 of 50%

Once Tusla confirms a referral relates to a concern about abuse, the first consideration is always the immediate safety of the child, and emergency action is taken if it is necessary to protect the child.

Where abuse is suspected, all matters are referred to the Gardaí in line with Children First: National Guidance. If children are believed to have been abused and to be at ongoing risk of significant harm, a Child Protection Conference can take place. The aim of this is to develop a plan with the child, their parents, and the professional network that helps keep the child safe from future harm.

If the Conference finds that the child is at ongoing risk of significant harm, they are placed on the Child Protection Notification System. This is an active national record of every child about whom there are ongoing child protection concerns.

The additional €40m funding I have secured for Tusla in the 2018 Budget will support the continued implementation of child protection services. Tusla aims to provide a proportionate and timely response to children at risk or in need. Where appropriate, responsibility and control will be shared with families and communities by developing joint solutions and through interagency collaboration.

Child Protection referrals made to Tusla by category 2011 - 2016

	2011	2012	2013	014	2015	2016
All Referrals	31,626	40,187	41,599	43,630	43,596	47,399
Child Protection Referrals	15,818	19,044	19,407	18,676	18,235	19,087
By Category:						
Physical Abuse	3,033		4,330	4,066	3,991	4,450
Emotional Abuse	4,001		5,271	6,233	6,535	6,870
Sexual Abuse	3,326		3,385	3,114	2,940	3,042
Neglect	5,458		6,421	5,263	4,769	4,724

Please note that the breakdown by category is not available for 2012.

Question No. 40 answered orally.

Child Protection

41. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the degree to which she remains satisfied regarding the adequacy of the response to children at risk in the home or in care, having particular regard to the need to ensure early intervention and follow up; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43735/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has a statutory duty to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care and protection.

Tusla provides a continuum of prevention and early intervention care supports to children and their families who are experiencing difficulties. Approximately 60% of all referrals to Tusla require this type of support.

Tusla has made real progress in dealing with cases where children, identified as needing a social worker are waiting for a specific social worker to be allocated to them. This will remain a top priority for the Child and Family Agency. My Department and I will continue to support them in their efforts. I am very pleased to have been able to secure an additional €40m for Tusla in Budget 2018. The use of this extra funding will include the recruitment of 300 additional staff.

I have been reassured to know that all urgent cases are dealt with immediately, and that Tusla ensures that the children in most need of a social work service receive one. The duty team social work system actively reviews the risk to these children, and new information informs the waiting time for allocation.

Tusla's Child Protection Notification System holds the names of children deemed to be at current risk. All these cases have a dedicated social worker, a Child Protection Plan and regular multi-disciplinary Child Protection Case Conferences. If sufficient progress is not being made, a child may be received into care, on a voluntary basis or by applying to the courts for a care order. An Garda Síochána, out of hours GPs, Maternity Hospitals and Accident and Emergency

Departments have 24 hour access to this list. This information helps them determine if a child that comes to their attention is already considered at risk.

I am most conscious of the need to enhance early intervention services and I glad to say that this budget has also provided for the establishment of an additional 11 Family Resource Centres.

Question No. 42 answered orally.

Foster Care Provision

43. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she will take to address the shortage in foster carers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43789/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): We need a regular supply of foster carers to provide a quality service for children. A small number of areas have problems in recruiting enough local foster carers. Other areas have good availability, but not all foster carers will have the skills needed for children with more complex needs.

Foster carers are acknowledged as the backbone of our child care services, looking after 92% of children in care. This compares with 74% in the UK. We have an extensive foster care service which provides care to a range of children, including children with emotional and behavioural issues and with disabilities. Foster care is also the placement of choice for older children and those in need of emergency placements, sibling groups and separated children seeking asylum.

Ensuring that we can recruit sufficient numbers of foster carers and the ethnic diversity needed to provide this variety of placements is challenging, but required for good matching between child and foster carer.

I please to say that I have secured an additional €40m for Tusla in the Budget for 2018, which will be used to target areas of identified need. Specific to the foster care service is the recruitment of social workers to recruit and support foster carers. Tusla are also receiving additional funding to establish a dedicated telephone service to provide out of hours social work support to foster carers for the first time.

International research tells us that the recruitment of foster carers requires a number of focussed strategies. Tusla employs a variety of methods in ongoing campaigns to attract potential foster carers. Examples include online and newspaper campaigns, information evenings, and, most successfully, focussed local recruitment drives involving local foster carers.

The outcomes for children in foster care in Ireland are much praised by professional colleagues abroad, especially in terms of school completion, stability, family centred care and progress in third level education.

I am proud of this record and I want this good work to continue.

I appeal to anyone with an interest in fostering a child to visit the Tusla website for answers to a range of questions a potential carer might have, including how to apply to become a foster carer.

Homeless Persons Supports

44. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the specific programmes her Department and Tusla have in place to assist parents and children within the emergency accommodation system while they await being housed in view of the increase in the numbers of children in emergency accommodation. [43712/17]

65. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the family supports available to homeless families in family hubs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43444/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 44 and 65 together.

I am committed to helping children and families as part of a whole-of-Government response to the problem of homelessness. While statutory responsibility for the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities, and responsibility for the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding rests with the Department of Housing, Planning, and Local Government, my Department has undertaken a number of actions as part of *Rebuilding Ireland: the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness*.

These include the introduction of free childcare for the children of families experiencing homelessness. This has been done under the existing Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) Programme, which provides a subvention of €160 per week for part-time childcare (three-and-a-half hours to five hours per day) over five days per week for all pre-school children aged 0 to 5 years inclusive. From 26 June last the scheme has been expanded to include a second option covering child care for a shorter period of two-and-a-quarter hours to three-and-a-half hours each day over five days per week. As part of the scheme a daily meal is provided for each child, the cost of which is included in the subvention rate. Currently 83 children have been approved for this scheme for 2017/2018 and a further 18 applications are awaiting decision. The scheme is also designed to help those transitioning from homelessness to permanent accommodation.

It is very likely that other children in emergency accommodation are also registered under other strands of the child care programmes supported by my Department, though it is not possible to identify the exact number in each case.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, works together with other statutory and voluntary agencies to provide services and supports to children, young people and families experiencing homelessness. Actions taken by Tusla include the provision of funding for child support workers and the appointment of a Homelessness Liaison Officer.

Family Resource Centres, part funded by Tusla, are working with people who are experiencing homelessness and many have developed local responses to the needs of families in emergency accommodation. These include, by way of example, family fun days, homework support, after school programmes, play therapy and transport services.

In recognition of the difficulties associated with homelessness and school attendance, Tusla’s Educational Welfare Service offers a number of supports to children (and families) experiencing homelessness.

Tusla’s joint protocol with the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) covers child welfare and protection matters for children in emergency accommodation. It is fully operational in the DRHE areas and it is intended to replicate this protocol across the State. A Joint Working Protocol between Tusla and Galway City Council and their contracted services providers was co-signed by Tusla and the City Council in July. Galway County Council has agreed

to meet with Tusla in the coming weeks to discuss a similar protocol.

Finally, the DRHE is coordinating the development of a comprehensive National Quality Standards Framework for homeless services on behalf of all housing authorities. Consultation with service users and key stakeholders, including Tusla, has been undertaken and the draft standards have been piloted in selected services. These standards, including a child safety element which will provide homeless services with a framework for continuous quality improvement, will be implemented nationally.

Ultimately, my concern is that we minimise and then eliminate the problem of homelessness. In the meantime, I will continue to support measures to help those affected, to the greatest degree possible within my area of responsibility.

Family Support Services

45. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to assist stay at home parents; and her views on whether these parents were not affected positively in the recent budget. [43711/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am committed to the provision of childcare options for families that respect parental choice and reflect international evidence on how to attain the best outcomes for children.

The Government has provided additional support for parents who choose to care for their children at home by increasing the Home Carer Tax Credit to €1,200 per year in Budget 2018. Previous provisions for maternity benefit, parental leave and the recently introduced paternity leave also demonstrate the Government's commitment to support parents. It should be noted that the Programme for Government commits to extending paid leave for parents in the first year of a child's life, which will be a key financial support enabling parents to care for their children at home in the critical first year. I will be happy to support my Government colleagues in progressing these as funding allows.

My Department provides a number of childcare schemes which are available to all families, both working parents and those who choose to stay at home to care for their children. From September 2018, the ECCE scheme will be available to all children over the age of two years and eight months for two full programme years. 114,000 children are expected to participate in ECCE from September 2018 and many of these will be children of stay at home parents.

Other initiatives will also help. The additional affordability measures, which are now being rolled out across the country, are an important first step in making childcare more accessible for parents who choose to return to training or employment. However, it is important to recognise that these measures, and those that will commence once the Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS) is introduced, are only one element of a broader set of commitments and supports aimed at parents and children. The provision of improved services for centre-based care is very important, but I will not lose sight of the needs of children who do not attend them. In this regard, *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People* contains a commitment to produce Ireland's first-ever National Early Years Strategy. The intention is to deliver a cross-cutting strategy which will take a joined-up, whole of Government approach to the issue of supporting children and their families during the early years (0-6 years). The drafting of the National Early Years Strategy is being advanced. An Open Policy Debate was held with key stakeholders last December and this has informed the strategy development greatly. Bilateral meetings with key government departments have taken

place. Development of the Strategy remains a priority for me and for my Department, and I will move to publish the Strategy as soon as possible after it is completed.

Adoption Records Provision

46. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans her to protect descendants of illegally adopted persons who remain unaware of their adoption status; and if she plans to widen the search for illegal adoptees in order to inform them that their medical records may be inaccurate. [43744/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The term ‘illegal adoption’ is used to cover a wide range of situations and actions including the incorrect registration of a birth. Such persons can currently seek information and assistance from the Adoption Authority of Ireland, Tusla and a number of accredited bodies. The Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016 will for the first time, provide a statutory basis for the provision of information related to both past and future adoptions. It provides for structured and regulated access to information and tracing services. Persons whose births have been incorrectly registered and their birth parents, will be entitled to an information and tracing service in the same manner as an adopted person or a birth parent of an adopted person.

In 2010 the Adoption Authority of Ireland undertook a review of information regarding alleged incorrect birth registrations held by the former Adoption Board. There were approximately 100 National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR) applications which appeared to be related to incorrect birth registrations. The 100 applications were roughly 50:50 pre and post 1953 (adoption legislation was introduced in to Ireland in 1952). In 2013 staff from the Authority visited the General Register Office Research Room to confirm that there were in fact entries in the Register of Births that corresponded to the details given on approximately 120 (the original 100 + 20 received since 2010) of these NACPR applications. The outcome of that was:

- 75 cases of people whose births were registered in the name of their “adopted” parents though no adoption took place and

- 40 cases where persons assumed the identity of their “adopted” parents but there is no record of an adoption or birth registration.

Other than this limited information, any attempts to quantify the numbers of incorrect birth registrations can never be any more than highly speculative given that it is impossible to quantify how many people are currently unaware that they are in fact “incorrectly registered”. Searching for these people would be very difficult if not impossible. Incorrect birth registrations operated in conditions of great secrecy and there were rarely any contemporary written records of these events. The few such records that do still exist are generally papers of a personal nature and are extremely difficult to locate.

Youth Services Provision

47. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the closure of a centre (details supplied); her views on whether the closure of such a facility would impact on the programme for Government commitment to tackle child poverty by increasing community based early intervention programmes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43752/17]

72. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will intervene into the closure of a centre (details supplied) in view of the centre's role in providing essential services to children and young persons in the community; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43753/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 47 and 72 together.

I was advised two weeks ago that a decision had been taken by the board of the management company operating Brookfield Youth and Community Centre to cease operations with immediate effect. I was not provided with advance notice of the closure but I believe that the Centre's closure was not as a result of funding issues.

I am anxious to ensure that the services being operated at Brookfield Youth and Community Centre, particularly those being delivered to at-risk young people, are recommenced at the earliest possible juncture. The funding for these services remains available and above all I want to see this funding being spent on these young people who had been attending at Brookfield Youth and community Centre. In this regard, I have asked Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board to work closely with South Dublin County Council to ensure that this important facility is up and running as soon as possible.

Brookfield Youth and Community Centre is funded under my Department's Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund. This fund was established by the Government to assist in the development of preventative strategies in a targeted manner through the development of youth facilities, including sports and recreational facilities, and services in disadvantaged areas where a significant drug problem exists or has the potential to develop.

The centre hosts a number of vital services, including youth services, which are funded by my Department. The youth services have been provided by both Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB and by Foróige staff from these premises. The youth workers who deliver these services were not employees of the centre and both the Education and Training Board and Foróige are looking to use alternative premises while the centre is closed.

Question No. 48 answered orally.

Child and Family Agency Services

49. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she is satisfied with the overall performance of Tusla; her plans to conduct a review into the operations of Tusla with regard to its child protection policy, in view of the report by the UN Special Rapporteur (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43742/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can inform the Deputy that I am satisfied with the overall performance of Tusla. I have no current plan to conduct a review into the operations of Tusla with regard to its child protection policy.

I recently announced that all remaining provisions of the Children First Act 2015 will be commenced on 11 December 2017. These include the provisions in relation to mandatory reporting of child abuse and in relation to placing a legal obligation on organisations providing services to children to prepare and publish a Child Safeguarding Statement. Tusla is central to the implementation of these important measures.

I recently launched the *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of*

Children [2017]. At the same launch, Tusla published an accompanying suite of Children First resource documents for those individuals and organisations who will acquire legal obligations under the Children First Act 2015. Tusla also launched a comprehensive 90 minute basic Children First training programme, to be universally available on line, free of charge.

In relation to the report published in May 2017 by the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection dealing with children under Section 12 of the Child Care Act 1991, Tusla is working closely with An Garda Síochána to ensure close and effective working relationships between the two agencies.

In Budget 2018, Tusla receives a 5.7% increase of €40.6m for 2018, higher than the €37m increase provided in 2017. The extra funding will be used to progress a number of key priorities including the introduction of mandatory reporting under *Children First*, addressing gaps in out-of-hours services and further investing in Family Resource Centres. It will allow Tusla to recruit over 300 staff to respond to areas of identified risk and to meet increased demand for services. This includes resources for responding to expected increases in referrals following the introduction of mandatory reporting and management of unallocated cases. It will also allow for improvements in Tusla's ICT systems and overall organisational structures, including governance.

We must continually do our utmost to protect children and young people from harm and assist them in achieving their full potential and I want to encourage and support people who work with children to continue to do so.

Affordable Childcare Scheme Data

50. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will report on the affordable child care scheme; the current and projected funding; the take-up across the country; the level of subsidies being given; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43792/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am committed to ensuring that childcare is affordable, accessible and of a high quality. I continue to work with my officials to deliver the new Affordable Childcare Scheme (ACS). Strong progress is being made in this regard with all the elements of the scheme, including the IT system and an ACS Bill.

The increase in supports I have provided for the 2017/2018 programme year represents a major step towards accessible, affordable, quality childcare after decades of under-investment. Two supports were introduced last month. The first was a universal (non-means tested) support of up to €1,040 per year for children under 3. The second was an enhanced support of up to €7,500 per year targeted to assist low income families to return to work and training.

So far in 2017/2018 the number of registrations for these new measures is as follows:

- Targeted schemes (CCS, CCSP and TEC): 25,775 children
- The universal scheme: 25,339 children

It should be noted that for most of the programmes, providers can continue to register children throughout the year and children may enter the programmes at different times. Therefore, I expect to see the number of registrations increase further over the coming weeks and months.

86% of service providers have signed up to deliver these measures.

As the expanded schemes only commenced in their current form from Sept 2017, I am providing the estimated cost for September to December 2017 and also for the full fiscal year 2018. These are

This represents an investment of €40.3m from September to December 2017 and €92m for the full year 2018.

I would also note that 86,711 children have signed up so far to ECCE for this programme year. There are three cumulative registration cycles for ECCE and this intake is only the first cycle. In 2016/2017 over 120,000 children registered for ECCE.

Question No. 51 answered with Question No. 40.

Departmental Programmes

52. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans for the ABC programme in 2019; the date by which she anticipates publishing the review of the programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43770/17]

510. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans for the ABC programme in 2019; the date by which she anticipates publishing the review of the programme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43781/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The ABC Programme is a joint prevention and early intervention initiative, led by the Department for Children and Youth Affairs. The Programme commenced in 2013 and was designed as a time-bound co-funding agreement with *The Atlantic Philanthropies*, in the amount of €29.7 million for the period 2013 to 2016. In late 2016, my Department secured additional funding to ensure that all 13 existing ABC sites could remain in contract until the end of December 2017. This brings the total funding allocated to the ABC Programme by the end of 2017 to €31.2m.

I am very pleased to announce that in this year's budget, I have secured an additional €2.7m in funding for the ABC Programme in 2018. The extension of the programme into 2018 will align the programme with the expected timeline for delivery of the national evaluation report which is expected in April 2018. It is expected that the report will be published shortly afterwards.

A key purpose of the ABC Programme is to identify the learning in and across the ABC sites and to transfer this learning into existing and established services, in order that we can ensure a greater reach and sustained impact in services across the country. The extension into 2018 will allow for consideration of the findings from the evaluation to inform plans for the design of future community based prevention and early intervention initiatives that comprehend the Programme for Government commitments in this area.

Mental Health Services Provision

53. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department has established a working group involving the HSE, the Department of Health and Tusla to co-ordinate a focus for the State's provision of mental health services for young persons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43657/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am happy to inform the Deputy that my Department is at present advancing this matter. I and my officials have met with Minister Daly and we are both agreed to review the co-ordination and provision of psychological supports between TUSLA and the HSE, including specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) provided by the HSE.

The work of this group will focus on identifying a clearer continuum of provision for such services, strengthening alignment and identifying gaps and areas for development. This work will, of course, be centred on the needs of children and young people.

It is critical that this group builds upon recent developments in this area, including, for example, the work of the Youth Mental Health Task Force and the Youth Mental Health Pathfinder Project led by the Department of Health.

It is also of the utmost importance that the insight and expertise which exists in the field of youth mental health, actively informs the process.

My officials, in collaboration with colleagues in the Department of Health, are currently identifying a date for the inaugural meeting of this group.

It is envisaged that this group will comprise the following:

- Representative of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs
- Representative of the Department of Health
- Representative of Health Service Executive
- Representative of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency

Additional input to the work of the group will be considered where appropriate. A draft Terms of Reference for the group has been shared with the key constituents and this will frame and direct the truly important work of this group.

I will be taking a direct and ongoing interest in the development – but more importantly the outputs and outcomes from this group – so as to ensure that we can further strengthen the coordination and alignment of mental health and related psychosocial supports for our young people.

Youth Work Projects Funding

54. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to increase the funding for youth work projects in County Laois. [43656/17]

59. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason funding for Youth Work Ireland in County Laois is lower than the national average. [43655/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 54 and 59 together.

In 2017, €57.4 m was allocated in current funding to support the provision of youth services, an increase of €5.5m on 2016. I have enhanced this by a further €1.5m in 2018. Laois Youth Services received €86,803 funding in 2017 under the Special Projects for Youth scheme.

Earlier this year, I approved funding of €800,000 for the establishment of new youth projects

and for the augmentation of a small number of existing youth services to meet new challenges arising from population increases. This additional investment is being provided in regions of the country where there is a pressing need for services to meet the needs of young people.

Each of the sixteen Education and Training Boards, including Laois and Offaly ETB, was invited to nominate locations within their catchment areas for the establishment of new services and to nominate a project or service to be considered for augmentation. In total twenty-eight applications for new services were received, including an application for a new service for Laois.

Based on the recommendations of a specially convened appraisal committee, and given the very limited resources available for the scheme, I approved the establishment of nine new targeted youth services and the expansion of a further seven to respond to new demand. The application in respect of Laois was, unfortunately, not successful on this occasion.

The Department has worked with Pobal and each Education and Training Board (ETB) Youth Officer, to map youth service provision across the State. This mapping exercise will assist the Department and the relevant ETB in developing a detailed social demographic profile in terms of both population numbers and deprivation levels. This exercise is due to be published soon and will inform future development and investment in youth services. My Department is committed to working with Laois and Offaly ETB to identify need and explore ways to address this need where it emerges.

Deputies will be aware that my Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work involving approximately 1,400 youth work staff working in youth services and communities throughout the country.

Children and Young People's Policy Framework

55. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the degree to which her Department continues to improve the quality and availability of services for children and young persons, with the objective of ensuring that a particular emphasis is placed on providing adequate support for families at risk; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43736/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Deputy is aware of my wish to improve the quality and availability of services for children and young persons, with the objective of ensuring that a particular emphasis is placed on providing adequate support for families at risk. I am very pleased that the €73m package announced in Budget 2018 enables us to continue investing in our children and young people and secures much-needed additional resources for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency and provides a full second year of the ECCE free pre-school scheme, with a heavy emphasis on quality.

Tusla receives a 5.7% increase of €40.6m for 2018, higher than the €37m increase provided in 2017. The extra funding will be used to progress a number of key priorities including the introduction of mandatory reporting under *Children First*, addressing gaps in out of hours services and further investing in Family Resource Centres that deliver services to families in disadvantaged areas across the country. The additional investment will allow Tusla to recruit over 300 staff to respond to areas of identified risk and to meet increased demand for services. This includes resources for responding to expected increases in referrals following the introduction

of mandatory reporting; management of unallocated cases and developing aftercare services. It will also allow for improvements in Tusla's ICT systems and overall organisational structures, including governance.

Budget 2018 represents another significant step in ensuring access to high quality, affordable early years care and education. From September 2018 all children will be entitled to a full two years of the ECCE scheme or free preschool, as it has become known. This further enhancement delivers fully on a commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government that is good for children, families and Early Years providers. I also announced investment to continue the childcare affordability measures introduced last month that are already benefiting 45,000 children, with 24,000 of these registered so far for the universal under-3 scheme, and 21,000 registered for the targeted schemes. The additional funding will ensure that the door remains open for further children and families to register and benefit from these subsidies throughout 2018.

Youth Services Provision

56. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on the impact a club (details supplied) has had on local young persons interested in animal and equine care; if she will work with her colleagues in other Departments to introduce similar programmes in disadvantaged areas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43528/17]

64. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will visit a club (details supplied) to examine the positive results of young persons coming together to identify their own areas of interest with community development workers; her plans to use this model in working with young persons interested in animal and equine care in other disadvantaged areas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43529/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 56 and 64 together.

The Clondalkin/Ballyowen Equine facility is an initiative which was financed by the Department of Agriculture in collaboration with South Dublin County Council. The facility provides a base for young people from the area who can't afford a private stable to care for their animals. It also provides an opportunity for young people to develop good animal welfare practice and equine education. Any further development of this initiative would be a matter for the Department of Agriculture in conjunction with the relevant local authority. As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs I greatly value such initiatives.

My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work involving approximately 1,400 youth work staff working in youth services and communities throughout the country.

In 2017, €57.4 m has been allocated in current funding to support the provision of youth services. Budget 2017 and 2018 provided a total of €7m extra funding for youth services. Additional funding is being used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services. Youth Officers are employed by the Education and Training Boards around the country to administer and co-ordinate youth services at a local level through engagement with the local services.

Foster Care Provision

57. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will allocate increased funding to foster care services in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43773/17]

513. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will allocate increased funding to foster care services in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43784/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 57 and 513 together.

Additional resources of €40.6m is being made available to Tusla as a result of Budget 2018 decisions by this Government. This will bring Tusla's financial allocation to just over €753m in 2018. This level of funding will allow Tusla to recruit additional staffing and respond to areas of identified risk and meet increased demand for services. In particular, the financial allocation will allow Tusla to meet a number of key priorities including:

- Responding to the introduction of mandatory reporting under *Children First* from 11 December of this year;
- Addressing gaps in Out of Hours services, including the introduction of an Out of Hours for foster parents; and
- Investing in Family Resource Centres in local communities that deliver services to families, especially in disadvantaged areas across the country.

I will shortly be issuing Tusla with its 2018 Performance Statement in line with the provisions of the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013. Tusla will, in response to the Performance Statement, prepare a Business Plan for 2018 which will be submitted to me for consideration.

The precise level of funding to be allocated to foster care services will be considered by Tusla, in preparing its Business Plan, having regard to the overall level of funding available in 2018.

Question No. 58 answered with Question No. 48.

Question No. 59 answered with 54.

Family Resource Centres

60. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the way in which the increased funding to Tusla for existing and new family resource centres will be allocated; if she will review the facilities of the two existing family resource centres in County Kildare for further investment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43790/17]

73. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if County Kildare will be considered as a location for new family resource centres in view of the low number in the county compared to the county's growing population; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43791/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 60 and 73 together.

17 October 2017

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, will receive an additional €40.6 million in funding next year. This will bring Tusla's allocation to over €753 million in 2018.

The extra funding will support Tusla in delivering an ambitious and necessary programme of reform of services.

I am placing a strong emphasis on the development of family support services next year. This includes the provision of additional funding to Tusla to expand the existing Family Resource Centre Programme, with 11 new centres to be included in the Programme. I am also providing Tusla with increased funding to support the existing Family Resource Centres across the country.

I am doing this in recognition of the importance of early intervention and prevention in assisting vulnerable children and families in our local communities.

I recognise that County Kildare has experienced a significant increase in its population base, and that there is a strong demand for services in the area. There are currently two Family Resource Centres in County Kildare that receive funding from Tusla. They are based in Newbridge and the Curragh. The needs of County Kildare will be considered as decisions are made with regard to allocation of the additional resources provided.

Following on from Budget 2018, Tusla will shortly finalise details relating to the process for admission of additional centres to the Family Resource Centre Programme.

I will also shortly be issuing Tusla with its 2018 Performance Statement in line with the provisions of the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013. Tusla will, in response to the Performance Statement, prepare a Business Plan for 2018, having regard to the overall level of funding available in 2018.

Tusla's Business Plan for 2018 will set out details of the additional funding to be provided to existing Family Resource Centres next year, and this will be submitted for my consideration.

In conclusion, I would like to acknowledge the valuable work of Family Resource Centres. I am pleased that I have secured additional resources to support them in their work with vulnerable children and families in our local communities.

Children in Care

61. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the additional resources her Department has provided to support aftercare plans for children leaving State care at 18 years of age from 1 September 2017; her plans to enhance this provision in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43423/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Deputy will be aware that from 1 September 2017, children leaving state care upon reaching the age of 18 have a statutory right to an aftercare plan to identify any future supports they may require.

The transition to independent adulthood can be particularly challenging for children and young people in care. Tusla had advocated for this important change to assist young people in making the transition from a young person in care to adult life, and to ensure consistency of support to these young people/ young adults in aftercare from 18 years and up to 21 years of age. This may be extended to 23 if a young adult is in full time education or accredited training.

Planning a young person's new independent living needs to begin years prior to leaving care and continue as part of the care planning process. This preparatory work is facilitated by a social worker in Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, and is based on collaboration with the young person, their carers and partner agencies. Resources, including aftercare workers, have been put in place to ensure this happens before a child leaves care.

Arising from Budget 2018, Tusla will receive an additional €40.6 million euro in funding that will bring its allocation to over €753 million euro in 2018.

I will shortly be issuing Tusla with its 2018 Performance Statement in line with the provisions of the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013. Tusla will, in response to the Performance Statement, prepare a Business Plan for 2018 which will be submitted to me for consideration. The precise level of funding to be allocated to support aftercare plans will be considered by Tusla, in preparing its Business Plan, having regard to the overall level of funding available in 2018, which will exceed €753 million euro.

It is not my intention to prescribe the overall level of funding to be allocated by Tusla to support aftercare plans. It is more appropriate, in my view, that Tusla first sets out its proposals for this important service area, having regard to its statutory remit and taking account of the totality of funding available next year.

Child Poverty

62. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps she will take to eliminate child poverty; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43754/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The reduction of children's poverty is a key political priority for the Government. The Taoiseach has described tackling child poverty as a moral imperative, and this is an issue that we must address robustly.

In recognition of the higher risks and life-long consequences of child poverty, the Government set a child-specific poverty target in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020* to reduce consistent child poverty by at least two-thirds by 2020.

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has the lead role in coordinating government strategies on child poverty. It also has lead responsibility for the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion and has identified child poverty as a key cross-sectoral priority to be addressed. My Department is working closely with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in informing the development of this cross-sectoral priority.

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has co-convened a subgroup with members of the Advisory Council for *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* to progress solutions to child poverty. The Advisory Council is continuing its work in relation to child poverty and this will extend into 2018 and beyond. Led by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, this subgroup has developed a paper which outlines a whole of government approach to tackling child poverty. Key priorities arising from this include providing universal access to GP care for under 18s, reducing the cost of education, housing, affordable childcare, labour activation and provision of in-work benefits.

Budget 2018 represents another significant step in ensuring access to high quality, affordable early years care and education with an extra €20 million being provided to support a range of childcare measures. These measures are aimed at those on low incomes, helping families to

overcome disadvantage and to help contribute to a reduction in child poverty.

I and my colleagues in Cabinet are committed to advancing efforts and actions in our collective response to this important issue.

Child Care Costs

63. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the ongoing difficulties in regard to affordability and sustainability in the non-ECCE early years sector; and the reason her Department has not increased the amount of subsidies payable to parents under the single affordable child care scheme in view of these issues. [43769/17]

509. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the ongoing difficulties in regard to affordability and sustainability in the non-ECCE early years sector; and the reason her Department has not increased the amount of subsidies payable to parents under the single affordable child care scheme in view of these issues. [43780/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 63 and 509 together.

In recent years, I have secured significant additional investment in the early years sector, focussing investment at each stage on critical elements of early years care and education. The new measures announced in Budget 2018 form part of a trend of continued growth and investment. In Budget 2017 I secured a 35% increase in childcare funding, which followed from a similar 35% increase in Budget 2016. Cumulatively the last three budgets have seen an increase of 87% in investment after decades of under-investment. However, I have said on many occasions that we will need significant investment in every budget for many years to catch up with our OECD counterparts.

The increase in supports now being implemented for the 2017/18 programme year represents a major step towards accessible affordable quality childcare. These increases reflect my ambition to support the provision of quality childcare services with appropriately supported and qualified staff.

These increases are considerable, up to 50% in the targeted subsidies, which significantly decreases the amount of co-payment required of low income families or parents in education or training. Parents can benefit by as much as €7,500 per child per year under the new measures. I also introduced a universal subsidy worth up to €1,040 per year; this subsidy is aimed at children not yet in the free pre-school scheme.

These changes are way-points towards our goal to deliver genuine affordable, accessible, quality childcare. My Department is also progressing the development of the Affordable Childcare Scheme which will ultimately replace all existing targeted schemes. This requires robust IT systems and an appropriate legislative grounding. We must ensure that the new system is absolutely fit for purpose as it will be with us for many years.

Notwithstanding the above, I recognise the pressures on childcare providers. Before the end of this year, I will be providing a further amount of €3.5m towards “programme support payments” for all childcare providers who register for the scheme mentioned above. This amount is in addition to the €14.5m that has been already paid to childcare services so far in 2017.

The increase of 7% in ECCE capitation I just announced should be of significance to all providers as ECCE has become a corner-stone of most childcare services.

Further, my Department has also provided capital investment of over €12m in 2017 with dedicated schemes for both Early Years and School Age Childcare. Investment will continue in 2018 with the detailed specifications currently being finalised by my officials.

In relation to the specific issue raised around sustainability, officials from Pobal and my Department identify and work with providers with serious concerns around their viability. €1m was provided in Budget 2017 for 'Sustainability efforts' and my Department is currently engaging with those providers to ensure that these vital services are provided with the necessary financial assistance. An additional €700,000 has been secured in 2018, for the purpose of assisting services enduring sustainability issues. This increased funding will allow my Department to increase the scope of the current sustainability assessment model so that any service undergoing issues affecting their sustainability will have the ability to apply for additional funding under this stream.

Question No. 64 answered with Question No. 56.

Question No. 65 answered with Question No. 44.

Child Care Services Provision

66. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the policy of her Department regarding the development of crèches and preschools in the Gaeltacht which operate through the medium of the Irish language; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43467/17]

67. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the policy of her Department regarding the development of crèches and preschools inside and outside the Gaeltacht which operate through the medium of the Irish language; the discussions she has had on this matter with the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43466/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 66 and 67 together.

My Department recognises that there is a need to provide supports in the Gaeltacht, and throughout the country, in relation to Irish language needs in the early years sector. This will include appropriate education and training materials and resources for practitioners and services.

I established a subgroup of the Early Years Forum, which includes members from Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta (CNNG), Gaeloideachas, Foras na Gaeilge, na Naonraí Gaelacha, the Department of Education and Skills (DES), the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DCHG), Udarás na Gaeltachta and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). This group has considered issues relating to Irish language issues generally and has fed the outcomes into the wider Early Years Forum. Consideration is now being given to the subgroup's recommendations within the context of the wider Early Years system.

In addition, officials from my Department are inputting to the preparation of the '5 Year Implementation Plan 2017-2022' under the '20 year strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030' in conjunction with colleagues from the Department of Culture Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the Department of Education and Skills.

Oideachas Gaeltachta

68. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** den Aire Leanaí agus Gnóthaí Óige cén dul chun cinn atá déanta maidir le tacaíocht a chur ar fáil do na Naíonraí le cigireacht trí mheán na Gaeilge, de réir mar atá luaite sa Pholasáí don Oideachas Gaeltachta, 2017-2022. [43765/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Rinne comhghleacaí de mo chuid, an tAire Oideachais agus Scileanna, an Polasaí don Oideachas Gaeltachta a fhoilsiú i 2016. Baineann mo fhreagra leis na Cigireachtaí Atá Dírithe ar An Oideachas sna Luathbhlianta den Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna agus leis na Cigireachtaí Luathbhlianta déanta ag Tusla.

Cuireadh tús le múnla nua de Chigireacht Atá Dírithe ar Oideachas sna Luathbhlianta (EYEI) ar bhonn píolótach i 2015 i suímh luathbhlianta. Tar éis na trialach seo, tugadh faoi próiseas comhairliúcháin náisiúnta dírithe ar an gcreat meastóireachta agus ar próisis na 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.

Cuireadh tús le clár iomlán EYEI ar 14 Aibreán 2016. Faoi dheireadh mhí an Mheithimh 2017, tá cigireacht déanta 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 gréasáin na Roinne Oideachais agus Scileanna. Rinneadh cigireacht trí mheán na Gaeilge ar 21 seirbhís den iomlán a rinneadh cigireacht orthu go dtí seo, sa Ghaeltacht den chuid is mó. I mí na Bealtaine 2017, cuireadh tús le hathbhreithniú foirmiúil den mhúnla EYEI agus d'eagraíodh seimineár poiblí chun na céad torthaí agus taithí an EYEI a roinnt le heagraíochtaí na bpáirtithe leasmhara. Sheol suirbhé comhairliúcháin chun 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 athbhreithniú agus faoin bhforbairt den chigireacht atá dírithe ar an oideachas i seirbhísí luathbhlianta a bhfuil an clár ECCE á cur ar fáil acu.

Spreagann Cigireacht na Luathbhlianta i Tusla a cuid cigirí le bheith ag plé leis na Naíonraí trí mheán na Gaeilge go dtí leibhéal cumais an chigire, agus aithníonn Tusla go n-athraíonn an cumas seo. Tá cigire luathbhlianta a bhfuil Gaeilge líofa aige/aici á earcú go sonrach ag Tusla, le bheith ag plé go speisialta leis na Naíonraí agus chun lánchumarsáid trí Ghaeilge a chur ar fáil, comhfhreagras scríofa san áireamh. Lonnófar an chéad phost i nGaillimh.

Faoi láthair, aistríonn Tusla tuairiscí cigireachta nuair a iarrtar iad, agus tá Tusla tar éis réimse leathain de cháipéisí a aistriú don Chigireacht agus do na soláthraithe cláraithe, atá ar fáil ar an suíomh gréasáin. Más féidir go mbeadh tionchar ag cáipéis shuntasach ar na soláthraithe cláraithe, tá leagan Ghaeilge di ar fáil. I 2016 thug Tusla faoi shuirbhé leathan faoi thuairimí na soláthraithe cláraithe mar gheall ar an taithí atá acu leis an gCigireacht, agus cuireadh sin ar fáil trí mheán na Gaeilge.

Pléann Tusla le grúpaí de na páirtithe leasmhara luathbhlianta agus tá ionadaí ag na Gael-scoileanna ar ghrúpa Chomhairleach na Cigireachta a chinntíonn go bhfuil béim curtha go leanúnach ar thacaíochtaí don Ghaeilge agus go bpléitear leo. Tá an Chigireacht tiomanta chun tacaíochta a thabhairt don Ghaeilge san obair agus leanfaidh an Chigireacht chun feabhais a dhéanamh.

Homelessness Strategy

69. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the analysis undertaken or being undertaken by her Department of the effects, both short- and long-term, on children and their development of homelessness; the way in which this analysis is guiding her Department's policy on the protection of children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43788/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am committed to helping children and families as part of a whole-of-Government response to the problem of homelessness. This Government recognises that homelessness is an extremely distressing situation for any family, and living in emergency accommodation is not conducive to normal family life. While my Department has no role in providing housing for families, we are working closely with Tusla to provide supports for families in emergency accommodation in order to mitigate the challenges faced by parents and children in this situation.

My Department has undertaken a number of actions as part of *Rebuilding Ireland: the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness*. These include co-funding a study on food access and nutritional health among families residing in hotel accommodation in the Dublin Region. Free childcare has been introduced for the children of families experiencing homelessness. As part of this scheme a daily meal is provided for each child, the cost of which is included in the subvention rate.

Family Resource Centres, part funded by Tusla, are working with people who are experiencing homelessness. Many have developed local responses based on their own analysis of the needs of families in emergency accommodation. Actions taken by Tusla include the provision of funding for child support workers and the appointment of a Homelessness Liaison Officer. In recognition of the difficulties associated with homelessness and school attendance, Tusla's Educational Welfare Service offers a number of supports to children and families experiencing homelessness. Tusla works together with other statutory and voluntary agencies to provide services and supports to children, young people and families experiencing homelessness.

Tusla's joint protocol with the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) covers child welfare and protection matters for children in emergency accommodation. It is fully operational in the DRHE areas and it is intended to replicate this protocol across the State. A Joint Working Protocol between Tusla and Galway City Council and their contracted services providers was co-signed by Tusla and the City Council in July. Galway County Council has agreed to meet with Tusla in the coming weeks to discuss a similar protocol.

The DRHE is coordinating the development of a comprehensive National Quality Standards Framework for homeless services on behalf of all housing authorities. Consultation with service users and key stakeholders, including Tusla, has been undertaken and the draft standards have been piloted in selected services. These standards, including a child safety element which will provide homeless services with a framework for continuous quality improvement, will be implemented nationally.

Ultimately, my concern is that we minimise and then eliminate the problem of homelessness. In the meantime, I will continue to support measures to help those affected, to the greatest degree possible within my area of responsibility.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

70. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the position regarding the site of the former mother and baby home at Tuam, County Galway; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43787/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In March 2017 the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes released a statement confirming that human remains had been found on the site of the former Mother and Baby home in Tuam, Co Galway. In early June I appointed a multi disciplinary team of experts headed by Forensic Archaeologist Niamh Mc Cullagh to provide technical advices to Government in this highly specialised area.

This was done to ensure that the approach adopted is informed by technical input that accords with international best practice in this specialised area. The Terms of Reference of the Expert Group's work are available on my Department's website at *www.dcy.gov.ie*. On 7 July 2017 the Expert Team submitted a preliminary first stage document which outlines the potential range of options which could be considered as next steps on this site. Again, this report was published on my Department's website at *www.dcy.gov.ie*.

In July the Expert Team conducted an extensive non-invasive geophysical survey on site at Tuam. This consisted of data collection through a variety of non-invasive techniques, over the course of 5 days. Department officials are currently liaising with the Expert Team, who are due to submit their final report shortly. I have asked the expert team to provide its technical advice in easy to understand language, so that we can all appreciate the options for the site and what each option would entail. This information will help us have a much better-informed consultation on the future of the site. Once I have received the report a course of action can then be agreed upon to build towards a consensus on the next steps to be taken.

Child Care Services Staff

71. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will meet with the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection regarding those community child care services that, due to their difficulties in recruiting staff through community employment, are having to cut services in areas of great need. [43708/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I meet with my Cabinet colleagues regularly to discuss childcare related issues, and to advocate the needs and interests of the sector in accordance with my role as the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. I would therefore be glad to discuss the issues you have identified with the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, should this prove to be necessary.

In relation to the staff recruitment difficulties you have specified, the majority of community childcare services are operating successfully and have been able to manage issues that they face within existing structures. Notwithstanding this, it is recognised that a small number of services have faced financial challenges due to the requirement to replace unpaid CE Workers with staff qualified to the standard specified within the 2016 Regulations. €1m in funding has therefore been made available to services that identify themselves as being impacted in this way. To date, my Department has authorised the transfer of €0.52m across 60 applicant services from this stream of funding. Furthermore, an additional €0.7m has been allocated to this stream of funding for the coming year.

My Department, and the 30 City and County Childcare Committees across the country, are available to work intensively with any service experiencing difficulties.

Deputies may also be interested to note that centres who register for the enhanced childcare measures introduced last month will gain access to the Programme Support Payment (formerly Non-Contact Time payment). This programme will aid community child care services with the administrative demands placed on them. A total of €18m has been made available in 2017 and has been secured again for 2018 and onwards.

Community services are also expected to benefit from the 'September more affordable childcare measures' given the increase in subsidies paid to parents, in some instances by as much as 50%.

Question No. 72 answered with Question No. 47.

Question No. 73 answered with Question No. 60.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

74. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the process of engagement initiated as part of the Government's response to the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes. [43693/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Following the publication of the Commission of Investigation's Second Interim Report in April of this year, I announced my intention to consult with former residents on what supports and services they felt may be of genuine and practical value to them now in the area of health and well-being. I appointed an experienced facilitator with an international reputation to assist in the design and running of these consultations and in early June I issued public invitations to former residents and their supporters seeking expressions of interest in participating in the facilitated process.

The first session was held at the Westin Hotel, Dublin on the 30th of June 2017. Over 100 people from around the country, the UK and the USA participated in the event reflecting the high level of interest in engaging with this process. Following on from the event a Facilitators Report was drafted and shared with attendees for their observations. A second session was held at the Silver Springs Hotel in Cork City on the 6th of October 2017 to ensure that more people had an opportunity to have their say on issues of concern to them. This second event mirrored the first and again a Facilitators Report will be circulated to attendees.

I attended both events and had an opportunity to meet many of the participants and acknowledge the generosity and courage of all participants in contributing to the dialogue. When completed, the Facilitators Reports produced from both events will inform my proposals to Government so that appropriate supports can be put in place as quickly as possible.

Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Youth Strategy

75. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the progress of the LGBTI+ youth strategy; and when she expects to report to Dáil Éireann on the strategy. [43692/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Programme for Government (2016) gives a commitment to develop a Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) Youth Strategy.

I established an Oversight Committee with an Independent Chair, Ms Una Mullally, to over-

see the development of the Strategy on 19 December 2016. The group includes cross-sectoral representation from relevant organisations, bodies and Government Departments/Agencies. A Youth Advisory Group also supports the development of the Strategy and has representatives on the Oversight Committee.

Consultations have taken place on a very wide scale, particularly with young people. To date, approximately 4,000 young people have participated in the consultation process either online or through attendance at the events which my Department has hosted across the country. A stakeholder consultation event was held in Farmleigh House on 28 June 2017 at which almost 100 organisations were represented. In addition an open call for submissions was launched in early September and closed on 27 September 2017.

Five sub-groups have been established this month and they are currently working to identify strategic priorities and actions. The sub-groups will report back to the Oversight Committee on the results of their work by the end of November 2017.

A report of the consultation process with young people and details on their views has been prepared and is in the final stages of drafting with a view to publication in December. The Youth Advisory Group for the Strategy will work on a youth version of the report.

My officials will undertake bilateral consultations with Departments in early 2018 to discuss the actions identified and approved by the Oversight Committee. I anticipate publication of the final Strategy in Spring 2018.

This is a key commitment for the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in the Programme for Government and also makes a contribution towards the Government's broader commitment to continue to strive for full inclusion of LGBTI+ people in Ireland.

Better Outcomes Brighter Futures, The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 - 2020 and *The National Youth Strategy 2015 - 2020* is providing the framework within which the Strategy is being framed with a focus on ensuring measures are in place to enable young people identifying as LGBTI+ to achieve their full potential.

Departmental Bodies Data

76. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Taoiseach the State bodies or boards that fall under the remit of his Department; and the number of members of each State body or board who are not qualified within the field in which the board or body has oversight. [43421/17]

The Taoiseach: There are no professional bodies or boards under the remit of my Department.

Government Information Service

77. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 4 to 6, inclusive, of 27 September 2017, the status of the commitment in his Department's strategy statement to examine the balance of power and responsibility between the Government and the Civil Service; and if he will elaborate on the operating principles of the strategic communications unit. [43573/17]

78. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if the director and-or other members of the strategic communications unit have been meeting political advisers in each Department; if

his attention has been drawn to the aim of these meetings; if he has received reports from these meetings; and if the Government press secretary has also attended. [43574/17]

79. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the position regarding the research his Department has undertaken on existing communication activities, including the range of campaigns brands and channels of communication used by different agencies as referred to in a reply to a previous parliamentary question; and if this research will be published. [43575/17]

80. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if advice from outside agencies or consultancies had been sought by the strategic communications unit before it was set up or since it has been set up. [43576/17]

81. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if the strategic communications unit will provide advice on the way to deal with crisis communications; and if it is responsible for setting a positive news agenda. [43577/17]

82. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the financial allocation to the strategic communications unit or another unit in the communications in addition to the merrionstreet.ie website or the GIS in his Department that is spent on promoting adverts or clips on a website and social media outlet (details supplied) or other social media outlets; and the amount that has been spent on a monthly basis to date in 2017. [43628/17]

83. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach his plans to place his speeches on either his Department's website or merrionstreet.ie. [43629/17]

84. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the position regarding his weekly messages on social media. [43630/17]

95. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if the merrionstreet.ie website is being revamped or changed; and the cost of same. [43859/17]

99. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if his Department is receiving external advice on a policy or communication issue. [43863/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 77 to 84, inclusive, 95 and 99 together.

The Strategic Communications Unit (SCU) 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. The Civil Service Management Board (CSMB) has decided to establish a sub group of the CSMB which will act as a high-level working group. It will be chaired by the Secretary General to the Government and the membership will be finalised shortly.

In addition, responsibility for communications will be assigned to an Assistant Secretary in every Government Department, who will work collectively to ensure cross Government cooperation.

This initiative will be progressed as part of the Civil Service renewal programme.

This oversight is in line with my Department's Strategy Statement, its core values being: A deep-rooted public service ethos of independence, integrity, impartiality, equality, fairness and respect and a culture of accountability, efficiency and value for money.

These core principles will inform how the Unit will conduct its business. Its task will be to simplify Government communications and to increase efficiencies across the public sector when dealing with the Irish public.

The Director of the Unit accompanied, by staff from the Strategic Communications Unit have been attending a series of meetings with Ministers, Secretary Generals and officials in Departments. The purpose of these meetings is to help improve effectiveness, efficiency and cross-Government collaboration in order to foster and develop a whole of Government approach to communications. As part of this work, a network of communications officials across Government will be developed to share best practice. This network of communications professionals will comprise the communications personnel within the civil and public service and will not include politically appointed personnel.

The Government Press Secretary has not attended these meetings. The staff of the SCU have been instructed not to attend meetings of political advisors. All meetings must include civil servants.

The Government wants to make it easier for members of the public to understand its work and the services it provides. Two projects are underway to improve this as part of the work of the Strategic Communications Unit, an audit of current Government communications and a survey to help us learn more about public awareness and understanding of Government services.

Working with the Office of Government Procurement, a request for the services of a company to complete this survey has been issued. This work will inform the future output of the Unit. The findings of this survey and the audit of Government communications will be published on completion.

No advice from outside agencies or consultancies has been sought by the Strategic Communications Unit to date. My Department has issued requests for tender for other creative services. These are being procured in accordance with standard procurement rules.

The Strategic Communications Unit has no role in setting a positive news agenda, its remit is to inform the public of the work of Government in a factual and non partisan manner.

As outlined in the Budget a total of €5 million was allocated to the Strategic Communications Unit for 2018, which will be funded through the Department of the Taoiseach Vote which actually saw a slight decrease overall in Budget 2018. The Strategic Communications Unit intends to leverage opportunities for building the effectiveness of existing communications capacity across Government, as well as rationalisation. A key part of the modernisation of Government communications will be greater use of digital media. For example, recent initiatives such as the promotion of the wheremyourmoneygoes.gov.ie website and promotion of online videos relating to Ireland's Rugby World Cup Bid, information about going back to school and the Budget and Capital Plan cost a total of approximately €19,000.

There has been no change to the practice of publishing speeches to the Department's websites, which are up to date. There are currently no plans for changes to Merrionstreet.ie.

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

Cabinet Committee Meetings

85. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach when Cabinet committee E, health, last met. [43631/17]

The Taoiseach: Cabinet Committee E last met on 12 September 2017. It is scheduled to meet again in the coming weeks.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

86. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he had a further meeting with the church leaders. [43632/17]

The Taoiseach: On 31 August last I held my first formal meeting with representatives of the Catholic Church under the structured dialogue process.

I intend to hold further meetings with other dialogue partners and I have asked my office to progress this matter and make the necessary arrangements. I hope to be in a position to meet next with representatives of the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland.

Seanad Reform

87. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he has set up the all-party group on Seanad reform. [43634/17]

88. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the position regarding the commitment in his Department's statement of strategy on implementing the Manning report in full. [43635/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 87 and 88 together.

In the Programme for a Partnership Government, the Government stated its commitment to pursuing the implementation of the Report of the Working Group on Seanad Reform (the Manning Report).

That Report was published in 2015 and it is available on my Department's website.

One of the recommendations of the Report was the establishment of an Implementation Group to oversee implementation of the reforms contained in the Report.

As my predecessor previously said in the House, he agreed with a suggestion made here some time ago by Deputy Martin that this Group should be based in the Oireachtas and should comprise members of the Dáil and Seanad from all parties and groups, with access to independent expert advice as required. He wrote to Party Leaders in September last year seeking their agreement to this approach and their intention to participate. I have reviewed matters in this regard and am keen to progress matters and will contact Leaders shortly with a view to having the Group up and running as soon as possible.

Northern Ireland

89. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he has spoken to First Minister Arlene Foster recently. [43636/17]

90. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he has spoken to deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill recently. [43637/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 89 and 90 together.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade is keeping me informed on a regular basis on political developments in Northern Ireland and on his contact with the Northern parties and with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

The absence of an Executive in Northern Ireland continues to be a major concern for the Government who have been encouraging and supporting the two main parties to reach agreement.

There is a real need for the people there to have an Executive working in their interests at this critical time, particularly in the context of Brexit which presents many unique challenges for Northern Ireland and the peace process.

Strategic Communications Unit

91. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach his plans for the €5 million announced in budget 2018 for the strategic communications unit; and the number of additional staff he plans to recruit in addition to the six who are working there. [43665/17]

92. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the element that is current and capital in the €5 million announced for the strategic communications unit in his Department in budget 2018. [43666/17]

93. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the way in which the strategic communications unit can be cost neutral and save money for his Department as outlined previously and receive €5 million. [43667/17]

96. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the locations and the way in which he and his officials plan to spend the €5 million allocated in budget 2018 for the strategic communications unit. [43860/17]

97. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the location savings will be found within his Department to enable the strategic communications unit to be cost neutral. [43861/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 91 to 93, inclusive, 96 and 97 together.

My Department's budget for 2018 has decreased by 2% compared to 2017. My Department does not have any budget for capital expenditure.

The focus of the new Strategic Communications Unit established in my Department will be to streamline Government communications for citizens, develop and deliver major cross-Government communication campaigns, and improve communications capacity across Government.

The Unit is staffed by existing civil and public servants. There are currently seven staff members attached to the Unit. 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.

My Department is also seeking to recruit, on secondment, additional serving civil and public servants with the relevant experience and expertise to work in the Unit.

The Unit's budget of €5 million is a reallocation of existing resources within my Departments' budget for 2018. The vast bulk of the budget for 2018 is being earmarked for public information campaigns, which will assist in citizens being better aware of Government work and services. As part of the Unit's streamlining of Government communications, efficiencies in communications spending across Government are expected.

Exchequer savings will be delivered by the Unit in 2018 through efficiencies generated by:

- cross-Governmental collaboration on major campaigns;
- more efficient use of technology platforms;
- consolidated media buying;
- efficient third-party contract management;
- rationalising design projects;
- streamlining participation in national events; and
- increased communication capacity within Departments.

In this way, the Strategic Communications initiative is expected to be cost-neutral in 2018.

Brexit Issues

94. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he has met or spoken to any EU leader recently regarding Brexit . [43813/17]

The Taoiseach: Ongoing political engagement with our EU and international partners is crucial, especially as negotiations on Brexit proceed.

I continue to use every opportunity to ensure that other Member States and the EU institutions fully understand our particular concerns arising from Brexit, to enable the best possible outcome for this country. Of course, other Ministers - particularly Minister Coveney, who has special responsibility for Brexit - are also meeting with their EU counterparts on a regular basis.

I outlined my recent engagements to the House on 4 October. Since then I have spoken by phone with President of the European Council Tusk on 12 October and Prime Minister May on 16 October.

I will of course attend the European Council in Brussels later this week, where I will use the opportunity to speak with my EU counterparts. I will make a post-Council statement to the House on 25 October.

Question No. 95 answered with Question No. 77.

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

Tender Process

98. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the number of tenders his Department is undertaking. [43862/17]

The Taoiseach: My Department has seven tenders which are ongoing at present.

Question No. 99 answered with Question No. 77.

Brexit Documents

100. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach when his attention was drawn to the

Revenue Commissioners report on customs; if this was a rolling report; and if it is finalised. [43864/17]

The Taoiseach: As I said in the House last Wednesday, I had read the Revenue Commissioners desktop analysis report on the customs implications of a hard Brexit in the previous few days.

The report referred to is a draft internal working paper and preliminary analysis, in September 2016, of potential administrative implications on customs processes following the UK vote in June 2016 to exit the EU. It did not examine any specific ports or other locations.

It is clear that such working papers are necessary to support the deliberative process.

However, matters have moved on significantly since September 2016 and in particular since Article 50 was triggered in March 2017. The draft document was not finalised and was overtaken by consequent major developments and policy statements.

Work Permits Applications

101. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of a work permit for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43774/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The General Employment Permit application in respect of the named individual was received in the Employment Permits Section and was placed in the processing queue on the 11/09/2017.

Applications are processed strictly in date order by Employer Type i.e. Trusted Partner or Standard Employer and the Section is currently processing Standard Employer applications received during the week beginning the 4th September 2017 so we expect a decision to be made in relation to this application in the next two weeks.

Applicants can keep track of our current processing dates at <https://www.dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Workplace-and-Skills/Employment-Permits/Current-Application-Processing-Dates/>.

They can also check the progress of their specific application online at <https://www.dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Workplace-and-Skills/Employment-Permits/Employment-Permit-Status-Form/>.

Consultancy Contracts Data

102. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the name, costs, date of commission, date or expected date of publication of the external consultant of all external reports commissioned by her Department since June 2016 regarding Brexit, in tabular form; and if all such reports have been published. [43379/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): My department is conducting a number of research projects to build an understanding of the possible implications of Brexit on Ireland for trading relations, enterprise and consumers. These studies will provide an evidence base to inform Ireland's policy positions as

part of the wider negotiation on the UK's future relationship with the EU and help to inform our broader policy response to Brexit. The details of the Brexit related research currently being commissioned by my Department is as follows:

Name	Cost	Date of commission	Expected date of publication
Sectoral implications arising from Brexit: Mostexposed sectors	€69,950 (excluding VAT)	June 26th 2017	N/A*
Strategic Implications arising from EU-UK Trading Patterns	€174,900 (excluding VAT)	June 26th 2017	N/A*
Import Content of Irish Exports and Implications of Brexit	€40,000	September 2017	March/April 2018
Brexit – The View of Irish SMEs (Survey)	€52,250	December 2016	May 2017
Brexit Vote – The impact on Irish SMEs and their Capital Funding (Survey)	€25,000	July 2017	TBC **

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

** This work is currently being finalised by the Consultants and its findings will be analysed by my Officials in advance of its publication.

Trade Agreements

103. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the selection process regarding trade experts who will serve as members of the various CETA committees; if these experts will come from industry, academia or otherwise; if she has a role in the selection of members of committees; the number of these experts that will sit on each committee; the length of time they will spend on the committee; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43404/17]

104. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department has carried out an analysis of the potential costs of CETA's investment court system, ICS, on the State; if the costs arising from defending future cases in the ICS will be paid from the Exchequer; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43405/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 103 and 104 together.

The EU-Canada Comprehensive and Economic Trade Agreement (CETA) entered into force provisionally on the 21st September 2017. This means that Irish companies may now take advantage of the all-important provisions of CETA including the elimination of tariffs on almost all key exports, access to the Canadian procurement market, the easing of regulatory barriers

and more transparent rules for market access.

Under the Agreement, the CETA Joint Committee and the specialised committees established under its auspices are bilateral bodies representative of the European Union and Canada. The European Commission will represent the EU, at the appropriate level, in these committees in accordance with the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union. In line with this principle, the selection of experts will be a matter for the European Commission to appoint on behalf of the EU, and Canada in respect of themselves. It would be a matter for individuals with the requisite expertise appropriate in the particular matter (economic, trade, employment law, environment), to express their interest in serving as panellists direct to the Commission. Member States have the right to be present and participate at the specialised committees in cases involving the adoption of decisions falling within the competence of Member States. The powers of the CETA committees are strictly limited to the matters provided for in the Agreement. Any changes to the text of the Agreement or EU regulations can only be made in compliance with the ordinary legislative procedure of the European Union.

The Agreement also provides for the establishment of civil society advisory groups that may submit opinions or make recommendations in relation to labour, the environment and trade sustainable development related concerns. These advisory groups shall promote a balanced representation of relevant interests, including independent representative employers, unions, labour and business organisations, environmental groups, as well as other relevant civil society organisations as appropriate.

It is important to note, that the provisions relating to investment protection and the Investment Court System (ICS) are excluded from provisional application. Member States will not be bound by these provisions until they are ratified by all Member States in accordance with their national procedures. In this regard, I have no immediate plans to ratify the Agreement given the Opinion of the Court of Justice of the European Union in the EU-Singapore case and the recent request by Belgium for an opinion from that Court on the compatibility of the Investment Court System with the European Treaties.

The potential costs for Ireland supporting the administration and operation of the Investment Court System in the Agreement would be very low. It is impossible to anticipate the nature of any alleged discriminatory actions that would provide the basis for a successful case against the State given Ireland's adherence to the rule of law and the property protections of our Constitution. In light of these considerations, an analysis of the potential costs of the Investment Court System would not be feasible or meaningful.

Departmental Bodies Data

105. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the State bodies or boards that fall under the remit of her Department; and the number of members of each State body or board who are not qualified within the field in which the board or body has oversight. [43409/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): In the time available, it has not been possible to provide the information requested. I will provide this information to the Deputy once it is available.

Health and Safety Regulations

106. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the way in which section 22 of the Dangerous Substances Act 1972 is being enforced; the number of enforcement procedures undertaken arising from non-compliance with the Act; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43590/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Section 22 of the Dangerous Substances 1972 deals with the marking of containers of petroleum-spirit (other than the fuel tank of an engine). It states that every container shall be clearly and conspicuously marked with the words “Petroleum- Spirit” and “Highly Inflammable”.

I have been informed by the Health and Safety (HSA) that they have not specifically targeted, or taken action, regarding the marking of containers under Section 22 of the Dangerous Substances Act, 1972. This is mainly because the requirements of the Dangerous Substances Act have been superseded by newer legislation. All large containers / drums will have ADR (Transport of Dangerous Goods by Road) marking and may also have CLP (Classification, Labelling and Packaging of Substances and Mixtures) marking. Small 5 litre containers are typically UN approved and are also embossed or labelled with a flammable warning.

Inspections carried out by the HSA have focused on petrol stations rather than private stores or maintenance activities where such small containers might be used. The marking of containers is specifically addressed in an Information Note on “Handling Petrol Safely” available from the HSA.

Any specific queries or concerns can of course be raised directly with the HSA who will be happy to advise on such matters.

Work Permits Data

107. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of the various categories of work permits such as critical skills permit for non-EU nationals per industry that sector have been granted to companies in the mid-west region over the past two years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43894/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Irish State’s general policy is to promote the sourcing of labour and skills needs from within the workforce of Ireland, the European Union and other EEA states. Policy in relation to the application and granting of employment permits remains focused on facilitating the recruitment from outside the EEA of highly skilled personnel, where the requisite skills cannot be met by normal recruitment or by training. Where specific skills prove difficult to source within the EEA, an employment permit may be sought in respect of a non-EEA national who possesses those skills. The system is vacancy driven and if any non-EEA national is successful in securing a job offer from any employer in Ireland which falls within those employments eligible for an employment permit then an appropriate application may be made.

I set out in the attached document the numbers of employment permits issued for the mid-west region for 2015, 2016 and 2017 to-date broken down by permit type and economic sector. The Department also publishes statistics on it’s website which includes numbers of permits issued by company name. These can be found at <https://dbej.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Workplace-and-Skills/Employment-Permits/Statistics/>.

Employment Permits issued for the Mid-West 2017 (up to 13/10/2017)

County	Economic Sector	Total
Clare		51
		13
	C - All Other Manufacturing	1
	J - Information & Communication Activities	3
	K - Financial & insurance Activities	2
	Q - Health & Social Work Activities	6
	S - Other Service activities	1
		4
	I - Accommodation & Food Services activities	1
	Q - Health & Social Work Activities	2
	S - Other Service activities	1
		26
	C - Manufacture of Computers, Electronics & Optical Equipment	1
	F - Construction	1
	H - Transport & Storage	1
	I - Accommodation & Food Services activities	4
	J - Information & Communication Activities	15
	K - Financial & insurance Activities	1
	Q - Health & Social Work Activities	2
	S - Other Service activities	1
		4
	C - All Other Manufacturing	1
	K - Financial & insurance Activities	3
		4
	K - Financial & insurance Activities	1
	S - Other Service activities	3
Limerick		317
		1
	J - Information & Communication Activities	1
		101
	C - Manufacture of Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	3

Questions - Written Answers

County	Economic Sector	Total
	C - Manufacture of Computers, Electronics & Optical Equipment	3
	C - Manufacture of Food, Drink & Tobacco	2
	C - Manufacture of Medical Devices	5
	D - Electricity & Gas & Air Conditioning Supply	2
	J - Information & Communication Activities	30
	M - All other Professional, Scientific & Technical Activities	1
	M - Professional, Scientific & Technical Activities of Head Offices, Management Consultancy Services	1
	N - Administrative & Support Service Activities	1
	P - Education	1
	Q - Health & Social Work Activities	46
	S - Other Service activities	6
		18
	C - All Other Manufacturing	1
	I - Accommodation & Food Services activities	2
	J - Information & Communication Activities	3
	K - Financial & insurance Activities	1
	Q - Health & Social Work Activities	10
	S - Other Service activities	1
		184
	C - All Other Manufacturing	1
	C - Manufacture of Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	2
	C - Manufacture of Food, Drink & Tobacco	4
	G - Wholesale & Retail Trade	0
	I - Accommodation & Food Services activities	5

County	Economic Sector	Total
	J - Information & Communication Activities	4
	M - All other Professional, Scientific & Technical Activities	1
	P - Education	2
	Q - Health & Social Work Activities	161
	S - Other Service activities	4
		1
	J - Information & Communication Activities	1
		6
	C - All Other Manufacturing	1
	C - Manufacture of Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	2
	C - Manufacture of Food, Drink & Tobacco	1
	F - Construction	1
	K - Financial & insurance Activities	1
		6
	B - Mining & Quarrying	1
	G - Wholesale & Retail Trade	0
	I - Accommodation & Food Services activities	4
	S - Other Service activities	1
Tipperary		128
		33
	C - All Other Manufacturing	1
	C - Manufacture of Computers, Electronics & Optical Equipment	1
	J - Information & Communication Activities	2
	Q - Health & Social Work Activities	29
		3
	G - Wholesale & Retail Trade	1
	Q - Health & Social Work Activities	2
		85
	A - Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing	2

Questions - Written Answers

County	Economic Sector	Total
	C - Manufacture of Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	1
	I - Accommodation & Food Services activities	3
	N - Administrative & Support Service Activities	1
	Q - Health & Social Work Activities	78
		4
	C - Manufacture of Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	2
	J - Information & Communication Activities	1
	K - Financial & insurance Activities	1
		2
	C - Manufacture of Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	1
	F - Construction	1
		1
	I - Accommodation & Food Services activities	1

Employment Permits issued for the Mid-West 2016

County	Type of Permit	Economic Sector	Total
Clare			72
	Critical Skills Employment Permit		28
		C - All Other Manufacturing	2
		C - Manufacture of Computers, Electronics & Optical Equipment	4
		G - Wholesale & Retail Trade	1
		H - Transport & Storage	1
		J - Information & Communication Activities	12
		K - Financial & insurance Activities	3

County	Type of Permit	Economic Sector	Total
		M - All other Professional, Scientific & Technical Activities	1
		Q - Health & Social Work Activities	1
		S - Other Service activities	3
	Dependant/Partner/Spouse Employment Permit		3
		Q - Health & Social Work Activities	2
		S - Other Service activities	1
	Exchange Agreement Employment Permit		1
		C - Manufacture of Medical Devices	1
	General Employment Permit		25
		C - All Other Manufacturing	2
		C - Manufacture of Food, Drink & Tobacco	0
		I - Accommodation & Food Services activities	4
		J - Information & Communication Activities	12
		Q - Health & Social Work Activities	6
		R - Arts , Entertainment and Recreation	1
	Intra-Company Transfer Employment Permit		15
		C - All Other Manufacturing	4
		C - Manufacture of Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	2
		H - Transport & Storage	1

Questions - Written Answers

County	Type of Permit	Economic Sector	Total
		J - Information & Communication Activities	1
		M - All other Professional, Scientific & Technical Activities	1
		S - Other Service activities	6
Limerick			428
	Contract for Services Employment Permit		4
		J - Information & Communication Activities	4
	Critical Skills Employment Permit		129
		C - All Other Manufacturing	9
		C - Manufacture of Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	7
		C - Manufacture of Computers, Electronics & Optical Equipment	8
		C - Manufacture of Medical Devices	3
		D - Electricity & Gas & Air Conditioning Supply	3
		F - Construction	1
		J - Information & Communication Activities	41
		K - Financial & insurance Activities	6
		M - All other Professional, Scientific & Technical Activities	3
		M - Professional, Scientific & Technical Activities of Head Offices, Management Consultancy Services	1
		P - Education	2

County	Type of Permit	Economic Sector	Total
		Q - Health & Social Work Activities	33
		S - Other Service activities	12
	Dependant/Partner/ Spouse Employment Permit		21
		C - All Other Manufacturing	2
		C - Manufacture of Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	1
		I - Accommodation & Food Services activities	1
		J - Information & Communication Activities	6
		Q - Health & Social Work Activities	8
		S - Other Service activities	3
	Exchange Agreement Employment Permit		1
		P - Education	1
	General Employment Permit		236
		A - Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing	5
		C - All Other Manufacturing	1
		C - Manufacture of Food, Drink & Tobacco	2
		C - Manufacture of Medical Devices	1
		I - Accommodation & Food Services activities	13
		J - Information & Communication Activities	10
		K - Financial & insurance Activities	10

Questions - Written Answers

County	Type of Permit	Economic Sector	Total
		M - Professional, Scientific & Technical Activities of Head Offices, Management Consultancy Services	1
		N - Administrative & Support Service Activities	1
		P - Education	7
		Q - Health & Social Work Activities	180
		S - Other Service activities	5
	Intra-Company Transfer Employment Permit		36
		C - All Other Manufacturing	4
		C - Manufacture of Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	13
		C - Manufacture of Food, Drink & Tobacco	2
		G - Wholesale & Retail Trade	2
		J - Information & Communication Activities	3
		K - Financial & insurance Activities	8
		M - All other Professional, Scientific & Technical Activities	1
		S - Other Service activities	3
	Sport and Cultural Employment Permit		1
		R - Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	1
Tipperary			152
	Critical Skills Employment Permit		22
		C - All Other Manufacturing	3

County	Type of Permit	Economic Sector	Total
		C - Manufacture of Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	1
		C - Manufacture of Medical Devices	2
		J - Information & Communication Activities	3
		K - Financial & insurance Activities	1
		Q - Health & Social Work Activities	11
		S - Other Service activities	1
	Dependant/Partner/Spouse Employment Permit		2
		C - Manufacture of Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	1
		Q - Health & Social Work Activities	1
	General Employment Permit		110
		A - Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing	27
		G - Wholesale & Retail Trade	1
		I - Accommodation & Food Services activities	3
		J - Information & Communication Activities	1
		M - Professional, Scientific & Technical Activities of Head Offices, Management Consultancy Services	1
		Q - Health & Social Work Activities	76
		S - Other Service activities	1
	Intra-Company Transfer Employment Permit		15

Questions - Written Answers

County	Type of Permit	Economic Sector	Total
		C - Manufacture of Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	5
		C - Manufacture of Medical Devices	6
		F - Construction	1
		S - Other Service activities	3
	Intra-Company Transfer (Training) Employment Permit		3
		C - Manufacture of Medical Devices	1
		S - Other Service activities	2

Employment Permits issued for the Mid-West 2015

County	Type of Permit	Economic Sector	Total
Clare			64
	Critical Skills Employment Permit		27
		C - All Other Manufacturing	1
		C - Manufacture of Medical Devices	1
		H - Transport & Storage	1
		Information Technology	2
		J - Information & Communication Activities	16
		K - Financial & insurance Activities	1
		M - All other Professional, Scientific & Technical Activities	1
		Q - Health & Social Work Activities	3
		S - Other Service activities	1
	Dependant/Partner/Spouse Employment Permit		1

County	Type of Permit	Economic Sector	Total
		I - Accommodation & Food Services activities	1
	General Employment Permit		28
		C - All Other Manufacturing	2
		H - Transport & Storage	1
		I - Accommodation & Food Services activities	4
		J - Information & Communication Activities	16
		Manufacturing	1
		N - Administrative & Support Service Activities	1
		Q - Health & Social Work Activities	1
		S - Other Service activities	2
	Intra-Company Transfer Employment Permit		8
		C - Manufacture of Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	2
		D - Electricity & Gas & Air Conditioning Supply	1
		H - Transport & Storage	1
		K - Financial & insurance Activities	3
		S - Other Service activities	1
Limerick			258
	Critical Skills Employment Permit		72
		C - All Other Manufacturing	3
		C - Manufacture of Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	2

Questions - Written Answers

County	Type of Permit	Economic Sector	Total
		I - Accommodation & Food Services activities	1
		Information Technology	1
		J - Information & Communication Activities	40
		K - Financial & insurance Activities	8
		P - Education	2
		Q - Health & Social Work Activities	14
		S - Other Service activities	1
	Dependant/Partner/Spouse Employment Permit		12
		C - All Other Manufacturing	1
		C - Manufacture of Computers, Electronics & Optical Equipment	1
		I - Accommodation & Food Services activities	1
		J - Information & Communication Activities	3
		K - Financial & insurance Activities	1
		Q - Health & Social Work Activities	3
		S - Other Service activities	2
	General Employment Permit		147
		C - All Other Manufacturing	1
		C - Manufacture of Medical Devices	2
		Healthcare	1
		I - Accommodation & Food Services activities	2

County	Type of Permit	Economic Sector	Total
		J - Information & Communication Activities	5
		K - Financial & insurance Activities	1
		M - Professional, Scientific & Technical Activities of Head Offices, Management Consultancy Services	1
		P - Education	9
		Q - Health & Social Work Activities	124
		R - Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	1
	Intra-Company Transfer Employment Permit		19
		C - All Other Manufacturing	2
		C - Manufacture of Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	6
		C - Manufacture of Food, Drink & Tobacco	5
		D - Electricity & Gas & Air Conditioning Supply	1
		J - Information & Communication Activities	3
		K - Financial & insurance Activities	2
	Intra-Company Transfer (Training) Employment Permit		3
		B - Mining & Quarrying	2
		C - All Other Manufacturing	1
	Reactivation Employment Permit		3
		F - Construction	1

Questions - Written Answers

County	Type of Permit	Economic Sector	Total
		I - Accommodation & Food Services activities	2
	Sport and Cultural Employment Permit		2
		R - Arts , Entertainment and Recreation	2
Tipperary			101
	Critical Skills Employment Permit		11
		C - Manufacture of Medical Devices	1
		D - Electricity & Gas & Air Conditioning Supply	1
		Q - Health & Social Work Activities	9
	Dependant/Partner/Spouse Employment Permit		4
		C - Manufacture of Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	1
		G - Wholesale & Retail Trade	1
		I - Accommodation & Food Services activities	1
		Q - Health & Social Work Activities	1
	General Employment Permit		76
		A - Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing	1
		Agriculture and Fisheries	1
		I - Accommodation & Food Services activities	4
		J - Information & Communication Activities	1
		Q - Health & Social Work Activities	66
		S - Other Service activities	3

County	Type of Permit	Economic Sector	Total
	Intra-Company Transfer Employment Permit		9
		B - Mining & Quarrying	1
		C - Manufacture of Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	4
		C - Manufacture of Food, Drink & Tobacco	1
		J - Information & Communication Activities	2
		S - Other Service activities	1
	Reactivation Employment Permit		1
		I - Accommodation & Food Services activities	1

Employment Rights

108. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to introduce a sectoral employment order for workers in the early years preschool sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43902/17]

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 for establishing minimum rates of remuneration and other terms and conditions of employment for a specified type, class or group of workers.

In this context, 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 the Minister on the matter. If the Minister is satisfied that the process provided for in the 2015 Act has been complied with by the Labour Court, he shall make the Order. Where such an order is made it will be 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.

To-date five applications for SEOs have been made to the Labour Court under the new legislation. No application has yet been made on behalf of workers or employers in the early years pre-school Sector. Any application for this sector should follow the procedure set down in the 2015 Act for consideration by the Labour Court.

IDA Ireland Data

109. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the names of all potential investors that have expressed an interest in locating a business or expanding an existing business in Drogheda or that have visited Drogheda or met with the IDA regarding same in the past five years, including those that have expressed an interest in working from the IDA business park. [43947/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The IDA Ireland Business Park in Drogheda is home to one IDA Ireland client - International Fund Services who employ approximately 250 people. There are 19 hectares of serviced, zoned and master planned land currently available in the park. This is marketed as appropriate to any potential investors. The Agency has also identified a 3.5 hectare site within the park that may be suitable for non-traditional investment projects. Information on potential investment leads cannot be made available as it is confidential and commercially sensitive.

Both counties Meath and Louth have a strong base of foreign direct investment (FDI) related employment. There are 21 IDA client companies in Louth and a further 17 in Meath, employing a combined total of 5,070 people.

Excellent infrastructure and close proximity to Dublin make Drogheda an attractive location for FDI and IDA Ireland is actively marketing the town to both existing and potential clients.

The table outlines site visits to counties Meath and Louth from 2013 to Q2 2017:

County	2013	2014	2015	2016	Q2 2017
Meath	1	2	7	8	0
Louth	4	10	20	24	10

Local Enterprise Offices Data

110. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of LEO business expansion grants awarded to County Wexford businesses in 2016; the sum of each grant; the average sum of each grant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44013/17]

111. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number and value of LEO grants given to County Wexford businesses in 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44014/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 110 and 111 together.

In 2016, the Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Wexford approved 28 enterprise grants – feasibility, priming and business expansion – in total for the year, to a value of €389,034.

The approvals included 11 business expansion grants totalling €187,269 for its clients. This equates to an average grant amount of €17,024.

As the first-stop-shop for the provision of supports to the micro-enterprise and small business sector in the county, in 2016 the LEO Wexford ran training courses for 948 participants, provided mentoring services for 132 participants and supported 23 applications for loan finance to MicroFinance Ireland.

The LEO Wexford also approved 45 Trading Online Vouchers totalling €90,811 to its clients under the Trading Online Voucher Scheme (TOVS), which is administered by the LEOs on be-

half of the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

Finally, under the Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur (IBYE) competition, the €50,000 investment fund available to LEO Wexford was awarded to the winners and runners-up in the three categories: best new business idea, best new start-up and best established business. In 2016, a total of 64 young entrepreneurs applied for the IBYE competition in LEO Wexford, bringing the total number of applications in the county since the competition commenced in 2014 to 146.

I think it is clear therefore the LEO Wexford has been very active across a number of areas in support of its customers.

Film Industry Tax Reliefs

112. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to extend the section 481 film relief beyond 2020 in the near future in view of the long lead time required in the production sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43370/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As a tax expenditure of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, Section 481 is subject to the requirements of the Department of Finance tax expenditure guidelines. The Tax Expenditure Guidelines can be found at: http://budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2015/Documents/Tax_Expenditures_Oct14.pdf.

As a requirement under the guidelines, reliefs such as section 481 are required to be reviewed periodically. A full ex post analysis and review of section 481 will be undertaken in line with the tax expenditure guidelines prior to any announcement on the extension of the relief.

The most recent Report on Tax Expenditures can be found at: http://budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2018/Documents/Report_on_Tax%20_Expenditures_2017.pdf.

Tax Code

113. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to ring-fence moneys raised from carbon taxes to establish a grant scheme for small scale energy sustainability projects, urban horticulture and other schemes that can reduce CO2 emissions on a more local level. [43377/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Hypothecation of revenue receipts is not a feature of the Irish tax system in general as it reduces the flexibility of the Government to prioritise and allocate funds as necessary at a particular time.

The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment receive an annual budget as part of the estimates process which they allocate according to the priorities within that Department.

Vehicle Registration Data

114. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Finance the number of cars that have been imported from the United Kingdom in 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017; if there has been a noticeable increase in imports since Brexit and the devaluation of sterling; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [43514/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the used cars registered for Vehicle Registration Tax that were imported from the United Kingdom in 2015, 2016 and for the period January to September 2017 are as follows.

Year	Imports
2015	45,454
2016	69,571
2017 (9 Months)	69,439

There has been a noticeable increase in these imports since the devaluation of sterling with a 53% increase in 2016 over the previous year. This trend has continued in the first nine months of 2017 with a 41% increase over the same period in 2016 (49,266 used cars from the UK were registered in the period January to September 2016).

Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

115. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to examine the criteria set out in the disabled passengers tax concession regulations 1994 which determine the qualifying conditions for the primary medical certificate; if the criteria will be changed to include primary progressive MS in order that a person (details supplied) can qualify for the concession when purchasing an adapted vehicle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43627/17]

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

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

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

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

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.

Stamp Duty

116. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to retain the 1% rate of stamp duty on family transfers. [43673/17]

135. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated impact the 4% increase in stamp duty announced in the budget for non-residential property will have on the purchase of agricultural land; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43701/17]

142. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to concerns about the imposition of a 6% stamp duty rate on farmland sales; if specific measures will be introduced to alleviate such financial burdens on farmers with small or medium sized land holdings who need to expand or consolidate their farms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43985/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 116, 135 and 142 together.

In my Budget 2018 statement I announced an increase in the stamp duty rate for all non-residential property transactions, including agricultural land, from 2% to 6%. On the recommendation of the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine I also extended consanguinity relief for another 3 years and provided that the stamp duty rate applying under that scheme will be fixed at 1%. Consanguinity relief is availed of in transferring farms to younger family members. It encourages the early transfer of farms to younger generations and is mostly relevant where the transferee does not qualify for an alternative relief such as the Young Trained Farmer stamp duty exemption.

Details of these measures will be contained in the Finance Bill.

Land Transfers

117. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the transfer of agricultural land; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43778/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that section 89 of the Capital Acquisitions Tax Consolidation Act (CATCA) 2003 provides for agricultural relief. The relief takes the form of a 90% reduction in the taxable value of gifted or inherited agricultural property.

To qualify for the relief, the person taking the gift or inheritance (the ‘beneficiary’) of the agricultural property must first qualify as a ‘farmer’ for the purpose of section 89 CATCA 2003. This means that a beneficiary’s agricultural property must comprise at least 80% by gross market value of the beneficiary’s total property at a particular date.

In addition, for gifts and inheritances taken on or after 1 January 2015, a beneficiary, or a lessee where the beneficiary leases the agricultural land, must actually farm the land on a com-

mercial basis for at least half of his or her normal working time for a period of at least 6 years after receiving the gift or inheritance. There are no restrictions with regard to the relationship between a beneficiary and a lessee where the agricultural land is leased.

I am further advised by Revenue that while the general position is as set out above, it is not their practice to give a definitive answer in respect of a hypothetical scenario such as that set out in the question. The correct tax treatment of the transfer of land between parties can be complex and varies according to the circumstances of the parties involved. The parties involved should either present full details of the proposed transaction to Revenue or seek independent professional advice if they wish to have certainty in his matter.

NAMA Social Housing Provision

118. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Finance the mechanisms available to NAMA and the proposed home building finance Ireland to ensure the provision of affordable homes on public or private lands. [43837/17]

119. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Finance the targets he has for commencements and completions of new housing units for 2018 funded via home building finance Ireland; and the mechanisms which will be put in place for recipients of this funding to ensure that houses are sold at affordable prices. [43841/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 118 and 119 together.

In my Budget speech on 10 October 2017 I announced a proposal to establish a new dedicated fund, Home Building Finance Ireland ('HBFI') which will be designed to increase the availability of debt funding to developers willing to build viable residential development projects. Up to €750 million of ISIF funds will be allocated to HBFI to provide funding on market terms. This fund could have capacity to finance about 6,000 homes in the coming years.

HBFI will not be directly involved in development – its role would be solely as a commercial lender and therefore will not have any role in designing the housing mix contained in the schemes it funds. HBFI will provide lending on commercial, market-equivalent terms and conditions. This approach would be akin to a bank or private equity investor. As such HBFI will not have targets in relation to social or affordable housing but will provide a significant contribution to supporting the delivery of additional supply of all types of residential housing in the coming years.

Increasing the level of housing output will increase the affordability of housing more generally, which in turn also will have a positive effect on our ability to provide social housing. For example, any residential developments funded by HBFI will be subject to the same planning and regulatory requirements as all other developments. This includes policies relating to Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 and as such, it is expected that a minimum of 10% of the anticipated output of this investment by HBFI will become available for social housing through this statutory mechanism over this period.

The current estimated shortfall in residential supply is 15,000 - 20,000 units per annum and, accordingly, the HBFI, with an annual average delivery of 2,000 homes, would reduce this shortfall by about 10% (assuming a three year horizon). This would be a significant contribution but it would not make HBFI a dominant player in the residential funding market and it would clearly leave room for banks and other finance providers to increase their contribution to funding much-needed residential development. The 2,000 units per year figure is a simple

average of the expected output and not a defined annual target.

Though HBFI is intended to be a debt funder for private residential projects, I can assure the Deputy that this Government is equally determined to increase social housing output over the coming years. For example, an increase of €31 million has been allocated to the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme bringing the total to €115 million. This is expected to deliver an extra 4,000 social housing homes in 2018. In my Budget speech on 10 October 2017, I also announced an additional commitment to further accelerate the delivery of social housing from 2019. I am providing an extra €500 million for the direct building programme which will see an additional 3,000 new build social houses by 2021, increasing the existing Rebuilding Ireland target of social housing homes to 50,000, of which 33,500 will be delivered through construction.

Electric Vehicles

120. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Finance the reason it is not possible to register an electric van for vehicle registration tax, particularly with regard to the Government's objectives to decarbonise the transport sector as per chapter five of the national mitigation plan. [43846/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The registration of electric vehicles is provided for in the Finance Act 1992, section 135C(3)(b). This section provides for a VRT relief of up to €5,000 on passenger cars, vans and other light commercials.

The VRT relief does not apply to other vans and heavier commercials that are taxed at the flat VRT rate of €200 per vehicle.

Further information is available on the Revenue website at: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/importing-vehicles-duty-free-allowances/guide-to-vrt/calculating-vrt/repayment-or-remission-of-vrt.aspx>.

Tax Data

121. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of moneys raised from carbon taxes on an annual basis. [43385/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the carbon tax collected on an annual basis in the years 2010 to 2016 is available on the Revenue's statistics website at: <http://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/excise/net-receipts-by-commodity.pdf>.

Departmental Bodies Data

122. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Finance the State bodies or boards that fall under the remit of his Department; and the number of members of each State body or board who are not qualified within the field in which the board or body has oversight. [43415/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The following bodies are under the aegis of my Department:

Office of the Comptroller & Auditor General

Central Bank

Credit Review Office

Credit Union Advisory Committee

Credit Union Restructuring Board

Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal

Financial Services Ombudsman Bureau

Financial Services Ombudsman Council

Investor Compensation Company Limited

Irish Bank Resolution Corporation

Irish Financial Services Appeals Tribunal

Irish Fiscal Advisory Council

National Asset Management Agency

National Treasury Management Agency

Office of the Revenue Commissioners

Social Finance Foundation

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland

Tax Appeals Commission

In making an appointment to any of the bodies under the aegis of my Department, I have regard to the body or agency in question and its particular area of responsibility etc. as well as ensuring that those appointed have the relevant qualifications for the positions and an appropriate mix of skills and experience.

The Public Appointments Service (PAS) is the centralised provider of recruitment, assessment and selection services for the Civil Service, Local Authorities, the Health Service Executive, An Garda Síochána and other public bodies.

The Public Appointments Service also aims to provide an open, efficient and effective gateway and process to identify top quality people for consideration by Ministers for appointment to State Boards. The website www.stateboards.ie is the channel used by the Public Appointments Service to both inform the public of vacancies on State Boards and to collate expressions of interest in those roles for Ministers. For each position advertised, the PAS process includes an assessment of all applications, following which a list of suitable candidates is submitted for Ministers' consideration.

Persons being proposed for appointment as chairpersons of State bodies/Agencies will be required to appear before the appropriate Oireachtas committee prior to them being formally appointed by a Minister or the Government as chairperson.

Tax Reliefs Data

123. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of claims made by companies for correlative adjustments in each of the years 2008 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the number of claims for correlative adjustments conceded by the Revenue Commissioners; the value of the tax involved in those claims; the amount of tax involved in each of the three largest cases in respect of the number of claims made in these years by industry and the other country involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43427/17]

124. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of refunds arising from correlative adjustments made in 2017 and likely to be made in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43428/17]

125. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the tax at risk in respect of all open claims for correlative adjustments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43429/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 123 to 125, inclusive, together.

Regarding open claims for correlative adjustments, I am informed by Revenue that approximately €242 million in tax is the subject of open correlative relief claims. Correlative relief claims may be more appropriately described as potential tax refunds which Revenue may be required to make in accordance with our tax treaty obligations, as opposed to tax at risk.

Regarding 2017 and 2018 claims, correlative relief with a tax value of approximately €24 million has been granted to date in 2017. It should be noted that, as the processing of these claims takes place throughout Revenue's four Regions and in the Large Cases Division, some completed claims may not have been fully recorded at the time of preparing this reply.

I am informed by Revenue that it is not possible to estimate the likely tax cost of refunds that may be made in the remaining months of 2017 or in 2018 given the complexity of correlative relief claims and the detailed work which must be undertaken to verify whether the granting of correlative relief is appropriate.

The table includes the number of correlative relief claims made by companies for each of the years 2008 to 2016 and to date in 2017, together with the number of claims where correlative relief was granted and the tax value of relief granted.

Year of claim	Number of claims received	Number of these claims where relief granted	Tax value of relief granted *
2008	15	12 (3 claims were withdrawn)	€319.2m
2009	13	11 (1 claim was withdrawn and 1 claim is still open)	€83.1m
2010	16	15 (1 claim was withdrawn)	€89.7m
2011	8	5 (1 claim was withdrawn and 2 claims are still open)	€40.9m

Year of claim	Number of claims received	Number of these claims where relief granted	Tax value of relief granted *
2012	13	9 (1 claim was withdrawn, 2 claims were not allowed and 1 is still open)	€34.2m
2013	10	5 (2 claims were withdrawn and 3 claims are still open)	€9.2m
2014	12	4 (1 claim was not allowed and 7 claims are still open)	€3.8m
2015	14	4 (2 claims were withdrawn and 8 claims are still open)	€8.0m
2016	9	0 (9 claims are still open)	€0.0m
2017**	3	1 (2 claims are still open)	***

* Correlative relief may be granted over a number of years and may take the form of increasing losses to be carried forward as well as refunds and off-sets.

** 2017 claims may be understated as a result of claims for correlative relief submitted since June 2017 which are not yet reflected in the records maintained by Revenue.

*** As there is only one case involved, publication of the amount of tax relief granted is not considered appropriate as it could lead to identification of the company.

The amount of tax involved in the three largest cases is approximately €372 million. I am informed by Revenue that their obligation to observe confidentiality in relation to the tax affairs of taxpayers or small groups of taxpayers precludes them from providing information requested by the Deputy in relation to the industry or the adjusting country with respect to those three cases.

Finally, it is to be noted that claim numbers and amount of tax relief granted as a result of corresponding adjustments agreed between Revenue and the tax authorities of other countries under the Mutual Agreement Procedures provided for in Double Tax Treaties are not included in the above figures.

EU Budget Contribution

126. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the basis on which the Irish contribution to the EU budget is determined each year; and the specific figures used to determine the actual or projected contributions in 2016, 2017 and 2018, respectively. [43460/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Member State contributions to the EU Budget are based upon a complex formula which includes Traditional Own Resources (customs duties), a VAT-based payment and a residual balancing component paid in accordance with each Member State's share of EU Gross National Income (GNI).

Given both high levels of economic growth in Ireland in recent years, when compared with that of other Member States, our overall share of contributions to the EU budget has grown significantly and Ireland became a net contributor to the EU budget for the first time in 2014. We forecast this trend to continue in the coming years.

Ireland's contribution to the EU budget in 2016 was c. €2,022 million. Our current forecast for Ireland's contribution to the EU budget for 2017 is €2,300 million and €2,650 million in 2018. However, both of these figures are subject to further revision with the release of new projections from the Commission over the coming period.

Revenue Commissioners Reports

127. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Finance if the recent report by the Revenue Commissioners on Brexit included an analysis on the impact of Brexit on Rosslare Europort; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43502/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the report is now available on its website at www.revenue.ie.

Budget Measures

128. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance the quantum of tax in 2018 estimated to be paid due to changes to section 110; the quantum inclusive of the asset base and the estimated tax from that base; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43640/17]

129. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to conduct a review of the impact of changes made in budget 2017 inclusive of the estimated tax take from the asset base of funds companies which purchased loan books since 2010; and his plans to issue a report on this matter. [43641/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 128 and 129 together.

In the 2016 Finance Act, my predecessor introduced provisions to address concerns raised in both the media and the Dáil regarding the use of section 110 companies and certain Irish collective investment vehicles by international investors to minimise their tax payments on Irish property transactions.

Section 22, Finance Act 2016 made certain changes to the taxation of qualifying companies, within the meaning of section 110 Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. The changes related to the taxation of profits which were derived from Irish land and buildings. Those changes took effect from 6 September 2016. I am advised by Revenue that as typically qualifying companies have a 31 December year end, these changes will impact approximately 4/12s of the 2016 taxable profits for these companies, with the full effect of the changes being seen in the 2017 taxable profits.

Revenue further advise me that the corporation tax return - the CT1 - for accounting periods ending in 2017, which for most companies will be due for filing by 23 September 2018, requires certain information from qualifying companies in respect of their Irish property businesses. When the qualifying companies file those returns, Revenue will be in a position to quantify the Irish property base of qualifying companies. Allowing for late returns and processing of data, data from returns filed in September 2018 will be available for analysis in early 2019.

The Irish Real Estate Fund (IREF) legislation was also to address the issue of non-resident investors, who have been investing in Irish property through fund structures, avoiding a charge to Irish tax on profits arising from Irish real estate. The IREF regime, which was introduced by section 23 Finance Act 2016, took effect from 1 January 2017. IREFs must operate a 20% IREF withholding tax on the happening of certain taxable events (such as a distribution of profits or a redemption of units). Any withholding tax deducted in respect of distributions made during 2017 must be returned to Revenue by the end of July 2018. Therefore, I am advised by Revenue that they are not yet in a position to identify the amount of withholding tax relating to IREF taxable events that have happened so far in 2017.

As the measures were implemented in Finance Act 2016, it is still too early for the Department or Revenue to assess the impact of the changes and would be impracticable to review the impact of the changes at this time.

In relation to the two measures, a yield of €50 million was included in Budget 2017. This estimate was both conservative and prudent. Regarding the estimates for 2018, my Department forecasts overall Corporation Tax receipts for a particular year and these forecasts do not include separate component elements for section 110 companies or IREFs.

Labour Market

130. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to conduct an investigation into unpaid work here by activity, gender, income and age; and if so, if it will estimate the value in order to begin moving away from conventional understanding of labour and to better identify barriers to entering the workforce. [43646/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Statistics Office (CSO), which is independent, is responsible for collection and publication of labour market data. My Department does not have any plans to conduct an investigation into unpaid work. However, broader labour market measures and studies are used by my Department to gain a deeper understanding of the potential labour supply and the barriers to employment.

The CSO publishes comprehensive labour market data in its Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS). This includes information on people's self-assessed employment and unemployment status and measures of the potential labour supply. The unemployment rate was 6.4% in the second quarter of 2017. The QNHS assessments of potential labour supply ranged from 6.9% to 13.3% depending on the broader groups of people included (i.e. unemployed persons, discouraged workers, passive jobseekers, part-time underemployed persons).

A recent Central Bank staff paper set out a proposed non-employment index that includes the potential additional labour supply, factoring in how likely each group is to transition to employment. This paper estimated that potential labour supply in quarter 4 2016 ranged from 7.9% to 9.4% when part-time underemployed persons are included.

There are a range of initiatives across Government which address employment, including issues around barriers to entering the workforce. These include the Action Plan for Jobs, Pathways to Work, the National Skills Strategy, the re-organisation of the further education and training sector and the Housing Assistance Payment. These various initiatives are the responsibility of my colleagues the Minister for Business Enterprise and Innovation, the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the Minister for Education and Skills and the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

The Action Plan for Jobs and Pathways to Work Strategy set out the strategic framework to

create jobs, increase employment and reduce unemployment. Reforms to date include the establishment of ‘one-stop shop’ Intreo centres; the transformation of jobseeker services through Intreo; new activation, income and employment supports; and reforms to provide lone parents with enhanced access to education, training, and employment support services.

There has also been a re-organisation of the further education and training sector with the result that Education and Training Boards are now better positioned to respond to individual and national skill needs across a wide range of areas and of the local and regional economy. The National Skills Strategy 2025 provides a framework to ensure the development of a well-educated, well-skilled and adaptable labour force, and supports an inclusive approach to participation in education, training and the labour market across all groups and skill levels.

Recent reforms – particularly the introduction of the Back to Work Family Dividend and the roll-out of the Housing assistance Payment scheme – have addressed concerns about work incentives for families with children.

Considerable progress has been made in implementing reforms to encourage employment, remove barriers to entering the labour market and to remove inactivity traps. The Government will continue to put in place the framework conditions for continued employment growth.

Insurance Industry

131. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the Government has not agreed to cover 100% of compensation claims against persons (details supplied); if this means former customers are now potentially liable for partial costs of claims; if he will reconsider his approach on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43664/17]

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

As you are aware, 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. Under the current legislation 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.

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. The liquidator commissioned actuarial consultants, Willis Towers Watson, to carry out an analysis of Setanta Insurance’s claims reserves as at 30 June 2017 and this has now been completed. The report estimates the claims reserves at between €105.9 million and €112.9 million. This is an increase from the first report in 2014, which estimated the claims reserves at between €87.7 million and €95.2 million.

A consequence of this is that based on this actuarial report, the liquidator now estimates that he will not be in a position to meet more than 22% of the claims out of the assets of the liquidation once all matters in the liquidation have been concluded, rather than the not more than 30% of claims figure previously indicated.

My Department is currently considering the implications of this actuarial report. In addition, you should note that there is also a legal concern that any Government intervention could undermine the priority status of claimants in the liquidation. The Department of Finance is therefore seeking legal advice on the impact on the State's ability to recover from the liquidated company if it were to compensate third party claimants.

Once this legal concern is clarified, the Government will be in a better position to consider its response to this issue including the implications this may have for all connected persons.

Tax Code

132. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Finance if he can confirm if all air crew (details supplied) pay their tax under Schedule E; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43668/17]

133. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Finance if Schedule E has been operated by all airlines in respect of all crew regardless of whether they are employed under a contract of service or a contract for service since 1 January 2010. [43669/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 132 and 133 together.

I am informed by Revenue that Section 127B of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 came into effect on 1 January 2011. This section provides for the taxation under Schedule E of employment income arising to any member of a flight crew in circumstances where the duties are exercised on aircraft operated in international traffic and where the place of effective management of the aircraft operator is in the State. The provision applies irrespective of the place of residence of the crew member.

Part 42 Chapter 4 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 imposes an obligation on employers to make deductions at source under the PAYE system from the payment of emoluments to an employee (i.e. an individual operating under a contract of service) where those emoluments are taxable under Schedule E.

Thus, where the provisions of Section 127B apply, flight crew will pay tax on their employment income under Schedule E and will be subject to deductions at source under the PAYE system. In the case of a non Irish resident individual, whether this charge is relieved from Irish tax will depend on whether a Double Taxation Agreement is in place between the State and the jurisdiction in which the employee resides.

Section 127B only applies where the individual is an employee and does not apply in the case of an individual operating under a contract for service (i.e. self employed). Where an individual is operating under a contract for service the individual is required to account for the correct tax due under self-assessment rules. Any such individual is required to file an annual income tax return.

Pursuant to Section 851A of the Act, which provides for taxpayer confidentiality, Revenue cannot disclose information relating to a particular taxpayer or a narrowly defined group of

taxpayers.

Tax Code

134. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter raised by a person (details supplied) regarding the tax appeals system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43690/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The objectives of the Finance (Tax Appeals) Act 2015 are to reform the tax appeals system with a view to ensuring an enhanced and cost effective appeal mechanism for tax cases. The Act, which was commenced on 21st March 2016, inter alia provides for the establishment of the Tax Appeals Commission (TAC) which was established on the same date. A key feature of the legislation is that taxpayers now make their appeals against Revenue decisions directly to the TAC and not through Revenue.

The TAC has recently undertaken a consultative process related to the operation of its rules of procedure involving all stakeholders. This was a listening exercise providing an opportunity to raise issues about the operation of the reformed tax appeals system. I have recently received a report from the Tax Appeal Commissioners in relation to their consultation exercise which is under consideration in my Department.

In relation to the issues raised in the details supplied with the Deputy's question, Revenue has a statutory obligation to collect tax, pursue recovery of tax debt and ensure that the tax system is administered in a fair and equitable manner. While tax write out features in the overall approach to tax debt management in all modern tax administrations, in the overall context of the collection and enforcement effort, the extent of recourse to write out by Revenue is very infrequent. The only circumstance where tax is written out is where a business/taxpayer is adjudicated insolvent, has ceased to trade with no assets, where collection is uneconomic to pursue, or where collection would cause undue hardship. Where a decision not to pursue a debt is made, the debt effectively becomes dormant. Tax write out only reflects a decision not to pursue the debt for a period of time and in certain cases, the write out can be reversed if and when Revenue considers that the taxpayer's circumstances have changed.

All write-out cases are closely monitored by the Comptroller and Auditor General. Chapter 21 of the recent Comptroller & Auditor General 'Accounts of the Public Services' report sets out the broad principles underlying Revenue's approach to tax debt collection and reviews Revenue's processes for 'writing out' debt deemed to be uncollectible, the reasons underlying the write outs and the amounts of debt written out by category of tax.

In relation to Revenue's use of counsel and appeals to the Courts I am advised by Revenue that it does not always engage counsel irrespective of the size of the case. Revenue has robust internal procedures concerning the use of counsel, both junior and senior. The decision to engage counsel in an appeal is dealt with on a case by case basis. There are appeals where Revenue officers present Revenue's case and there are appeals, particularly cases in which a point of law, rather than the quantum of a tax liability, is being disputed, where counsel (whether junior or senior) is more likely to be engaged.

Revenue also advises that any decision to pursue an appeal case to the Courts following a determination of Appeal Commissioners follows an analysis of the both the quantum of tax at stake and the precedential nature of the point of law in question. I am advised that certain cases where a relatively small quantum of tax is a stake could result in a significant loss to the Exchequer if an incorrect interpretation of law is accepted and applied generally, and that it is

Revenue's duty to pursue cases where doubt exists as to the correct position.

In relation to an opportunity to settle I am advised by Revenue that all taxpayers with an appeal have had, and continue to have, the opportunity to settle the appeal by agreement with Revenue. On 21 March 2016, the date on which the Finance (Tax Appeals) Act 2015 came into operation Revenue was still dealing with appeals that were made before this date but that had not yet been referred to the Appeal Commissioners. Revenue was obliged under Section 31 of the 2015 Act to refer such appeals to the TAC as soon as practicable after 21 March 2016. However, before doing so, Revenue was required to notify the appellant of this statutory requirement and to request that the appellant indicate whether he or she wished to settle the appeal by agreement with Revenue or to have the appeal referred to the TAC for hearing. Where the appellant indicated a wish to settle the appeal by agreement but agreement was not then reached, Revenue was required to refer the appeal to the TAC.

In addition to this express statutory provision, Revenue advise that they are always willing to engage in discussion with taxpayers and their agents with a view to settling appeals prior to any hearing before the TAC and also prior to any hearing by the Courts where a case proceeds to that level.

As regards opportunities to address backlog I am advised that of the backlog of appeal cases on hands there is a significant volume of cases that may potentially be addressed in groups where the matter in dispute is common across a number of taxpayers. While the authority to consider appeal cases in this manner is statutorily vested in the TAC, Revenue advises that it is very supportive of this approach and will provide any assistance necessary to the TAC to enable it to address the backlog of cases by considering appeals in groups where this is an appropriate approach.

Question No. 135 answered with Question No. 116.

Tax Credits

136. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to provide tax credits for private well owners, group water schemes or those who have financed their own water supply but are also required to pay for water from general taxation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43857/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have no plans at present to provide a tax credit for individuals in the manner described by the Deputy. More generally, the funding of water services is a matter for the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Revenue Commissioners Reports

137. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance whether his or his officials' attention have been drawn to the fact the Revenue Commissioners are still working on the implications of a border on trade and customs in Ireland post-Brexit. [43865/17]

138. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if the Revenue Commissioners' report on customs that was commenced in 2015 was a rolling report; when his Department was informed of its contents; and when this information ceased. [43866/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 137 and 138 together.

I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the above mentioned report is now available on their website at www.revenue.ie

The published draft was an internal working paper and a preliminary analysis which was compiled in September 2016, following the UK vote in June 2016 to exit the EU. It is clear that such working papers are necessary to support the deliberative process.

However, it is important to note that matters have moved on significantly since September 2016 and in particular since Article 50 was triggered in March 2017. As such, I note that this document remains in draft format and was not finalised as it was overtaken by consequent major developments and policy statements. I am informed that it does not reflect Revenue's current view on Brexit.

Like all Government agencies, the Revenue Commissioners are actively engaged in examining a range of scenarios in order to support Ireland's objectives. This work is being undertaken within the whole-of-Government framework previously coordinated by the Department of the Taoiseach and now led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The precise customs arrangements that will apply after Brexit will depend on the outcome of negotiations between the EU and UK however it is clear that political solutions must be found before technical resolutions can be applied.

The Government's priorities in relation to the unique concerns that arise for Ireland in the context of Brexit are very clear - to maintain the Common Travel Area and to protect the gains of the peace process and the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts, including avoiding a hard border.

Evidently the closest trading relationship between the UK and EU is best for Ireland. The Taoiseach has reiterated this position on many occasions, most recently in the Dáil last week.

The Government welcomes that these priorities have been reflected in the EU's negotiating position and further welcomes and supports the Taskforce's paper on the "Guiding Principles for the dialogue on Ireland/Northern Ireland", which was published on 7 September. The paper builds on the European Council Guidelines and reflects the priority Irish issues identified by the Government, including that, in view of the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland, flexible and imaginative solutions will be required to avoid a hard border, including any physical border infrastructure. This must be achieved in a way which ensures that Ireland's place within the Internal Market and Customs Union is unaffected. The paper also makes it clear that it is the UK's responsibility to propose workable solutions in this regard. It is the Government's view that the UK staying in the customs union and single market, or as close as possible to that, would be the best solution.

However, it is important that internal analysis continues in the meantime. Several helpful reports and working papers have been published by the ESRI, Intertrade Ireland, and business representative bodies. Most recently, my Department and Revenue co-sponsored an ESRI study, ESRI Working Paper 573 on Ireland's Trade and Transport Connections, which was published on Thursday 12 October 2017.

Primary Medical Certificates Provision

139. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance when a primary medical certificate will be awarded in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43878/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The provision of a primary medical certificate is based on a professional clinical determination by the Senior Medical Officer for the relevant local Health Service Executive. To qualify for a primary medical certificate an applicant must be permanently and severely disabled within the terms of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994.

An unsuccessful applicant can appeal the decision of the Senior Medical Officer to the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeal. The Medical Board of Appeal is independent in the exercise of its functions to ensure the integrity of its clinical determinations.

Tax Reliefs Eligibility

140. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance if there is an option available for a retired person living here to receive a refund on medical expenses when only paying tax on their income in the UK; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43926/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In the absence of specific information it is difficult to provide a comprehensive reply to the Deputy. Relief in respect of health expenses, granted in accordance with section 469 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, is used to reduce the Irish tax liability of an individual in respect of the year of assessment in which the expenses are incurred. In general, if an individual is tax resident in Ireland, their world-wide income is taxable in Ireland and relief can be claimed for medical expenses. However, where an individual's sole income for a year of assessment is not taxable in Ireland, for example where that income is a UK Government pension, then it is not possible to claim relief as no tax liability arises against which to claim the relief.

State Aid

141. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the dates his Department has received regarding the date for the appeal by the State against the European Court of Justice, ECJ, ruling on a case (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43945/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government profoundly disagrees with the European Commission's analysis in the Apple State Aid case.

An appeal is therefore being brought before the European Courts. Such an appeal takes the form of an application to the General Court of the European Union (GCEU), asking it to annul the Commission's Final Decision.

The Attorney General prepared the legal grounds in support of the annulment proceedings and the application was lodged in the GCEU in 2016. As is normal practice, a summary of these have been published in the Official Journal of the European Union. They were also published on the Department of Finance's website in December 2016.

The case has been granted priority status and is progressing through the various stages of private written proceedings before the GCEU. It is at the discretion of the court to determine if there will be oral proceedings, either in public or in private. It will likely be several years before the matter is ultimately settled by the European Courts.

As this is the subject of open legal proceedings, it will not be possible to comment further, in particular on any of the individual elements of the State's legal case in defence of our position.

This is important to ensure that we do not prejudice our own legal case.

Notwithstanding the appeal, Ireland is obliged to comply with binding Articles of the Commission's Decision regarding recovery. Officials and experts from across the State have been engaged in intensive work to ensure that Ireland complies with all its recovery obligations as soon as possible.

Question No. 142 answered with Question No. 116.

Fiscal Policy

143. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the detailed allocation for fiscal space in budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43986/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The allocation for fiscal space in Budget 2018 was flagged in note 2, table A8 of the Economic and Fiscal Outlook of Budget 2018 book as being unchanged from that which was presented in Summer Economic Statement 2017. In my Budget 2018 speech, I announced that the remaining unallocated fiscal space for 2018 would amount to a little over €500 million in nominal terms, and that €180 million of that had since been committed to the Public Service Stability Agreement. To augment the remaining fiscal space, I introduced a range of discretionary revenue measures as set out in the Tax Policy Changes document published on Budget day.

As I am sure the Deputy is aware, the distribution of the Budget day package resulted in additional expenditure measures of just under €900 million and tax reductions of €335 million.

Tax Yield

144. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated tax revenue from the increase in stamp duty from 2% to 6% on commercial property; if this estimate was based on current 2017 volume; if it is assumed 2018 sales volumes will be equal to 2017 volumes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44052/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Revenue Ready Reckoner (<http://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/ready-reckoner/index.aspx>, on page 18) shows the effect of a 0.5% increase in the Stamp Duty rate on non-residential property (€47m). This is multiplied up to €94m for a 1% increase, or €376m for a 4% increase.

I am advised by Revenue that the estimated yield for 2018 is based on payments of Stamp Duty on the purchase of non-residential property in 2016 and an assessment of trends in payments in 2017 to date. The estimated yield makes an assumption of no behavioural change.

State Aid

145. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the organisation which will be underwriting loans for home building finance Ireland, either HBFi itself or NAMA; the way in which NAMA and HBFi will interact; if HBFi has flexibility to provide different types of finance from guarantees to mezzanine finance; if it is strictly confined to providing loans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44054/17]

146. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the percentage of the funding of residential construction projects home building finance Ireland, HBFI, will provide; if there is an upper limit on the amount it can provide; the restrictions in place in terms of collateral needed for projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44055/17]

147. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the qualifying characteristics needed for a builder or a developer to obtain finance from home building finance Ireland, HBFI; the protections put in place to prevent HBFI crowding out funding from alternative sources; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44056/17]

148. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the expected cost of funding charged on the loans home building finance Ireland, HBFI, will provide; the way in which the 2,000 houses per year estimate for HBFI was established; the way in which the 6,000 estimate was established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44057/17]

153. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when he expects the HBFI to be up and running; when he expects the fund to commence lending; if the scheme has been given state aid approval by the European Commission; the way in which he expects the HBFI to be compliant with state aid rules; if he expects the HBFI to be affected by the state aid complaint already in process on NAMA; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44062/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 145 to 148, inclusive, and 153 together.

As announced in my Budget speech on 10 October 2017, it is my intention to establish Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFI) to provide funding on market terms to viable residential development projects whose owners are experiencing difficulty in obtaining debt funding.

HBFI will be a stand-alone entity which will provide funding directly into the market.

HBFI will be designed to leverage off the extensive experience already available to the State to deliver this initiative and as such existing NAMA staff skills and expertise will be utilised to deliver this funding. However any lending provided in due course will be provided by HBFI which will be fully separate and will not impact NAMA's existing objectives or its Board's strategic wind down plans. The exact staffing and servicing arrangements are currently being devised by my officials and NAMA and will be confirmed in due course.

In relation to the products that will be offered by HBFI, the fund will be designed to focus on the provision of debt funding to viable residential development projects. As the Deputy will be aware, the State is already providing a number of alternative supports into this market, including equity finance, through the ISIF's existing residential development funding platforms.

I am not in a position to confirm the specific product terms and conditions requested by the Deputy, as these will be set by the board of HBFI in due course. I can confirm that HBFI will be lending on commercial, market-equivalent terms and conditions, which would depend on the risk profile of each individual project, the quality of collateral and the creditworthiness of the borrower. This approach would be akin to a bank or private equity investor, in that HBFI would not be directly involved in development – its role would be solely as a commercial lender. Commercial viability testing will also ensure returns are the same as market norms.

With a proposed allocation of up to €750 million, the HBFI could have capacity to fund about 6,000 homes in the coming years. The current estimated shortfall in residential supply is 15,000 – 20,000 units per annum and, accordingly, the HBFI, with an annual average delivery of 2,000 homes, would reduce this shortfall by about 10% (assuming a three year horizon). This would be a significant contribution but it would not make HBFI a dominant player in the

residential funding market and it would clearly leave room for banks and other finance providers to increase their contribution to funding much-needed residential development.

I can confirm that the delivery estimate included in the Budget documentation was based on an assumed delivery cost of €250,000 per unit and an assumption that HBFi would recycle the allocated funding once over an estimated three year time horizon.

In relation to State aid issues, the proposal has been designed to provide lending to the market at commercial rates. The establishment of the fund will be discussed with the European Commission over the coming months and my officials have already had preliminary discussions with the European Commission in relation to the initiative. As advised, there is clear legal separation between HBFi and NAMA and the proposal will not impact NAMA's mandate or wind down plans. As a result, I do not envisage any impact from this proposal on the existing State aid complaint in relation to NAMA currently under consideration by the European Commission.

Finally, I would be hopeful of bringing the establishing legislation to the Houses of the Oireachtas for approval in late 2017 or early 2018, with a view to HBFi commencing operations in Q2 2018. It is not expected that HBFi will have an indefinite lifespan but it is too early to speculate on how long it may operate as this will depend on the availability of funding in the market to meet demand for homes in the coming years.

Budget Measures

149. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the details of the Brexit fund announced on budget day; the type of loans it will provide; the way in which companies qualify for assistance; the rate which will be charged on the funding provided; the organisation that will undertake the underwriting of loans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44058/17]

152. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when he expects the new Brexit fund to be up and running; when he expects the fund to commence lending; if this fund has been given State aid approval by the European Commission; the way in which he expects the Brexit fund to be compliant with State aid rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44061/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 149 and 152 together.

As the Deputy is aware, the impact of Brexit is currently still unfolding. However, what is clear is that Brexit is likely to affect Ireland's trade patterns and SMEs. To meet the working capital needs of Irish SMEs and to assist them with adapting and innovating in response to the challenges, and opportunities, posed by Brexit I announced a €300 million Brexit Loan Guarantee in my speech for Budget 2018. This Scheme forms part of the wider Government Brexit Strategy and was developed by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in conjunction with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland and Enterprise Ireland.

It is intended that the Scheme will operate under the *de minimis* State aid rules and be supported by both State and European guarantees. Loans at competitive interest rates will be available to all viable but vulnerable Irish SMEs and small MidCaps, businesses with less than 499 employees, who are exposed to the impact of Brexit. As part of the application process, businesses will be required to produce a business plan that demonstrates how they intend to adjust

to the challenges they face because of Brexit. All applications will be assessed for eligibility by the SBCI and then subject to the normal lending assessment criteria of the commercial finance providers involved in the Scheme. Due to State aid rules, the Scheme will not be available to primary producers in the agriculture sector or to the fishing sector.

I expect the Scheme will be launched in March of next year. Further details of the Scheme will be provided shortly by my colleagues, the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Ireland Strategic Investment Fund Investments

150. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the details of the proposed transfer of €1.5 billion from the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund, ISIF, to the rainy day fund; if this is additional to the anticipated €500 million per year to be invested from fiscal space; the amount anticipated to be in the rainy day fund at the end of 2021; the closing date for submissions on the consultation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44059/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The establishment of the Rainy Day Fund, including the proposed transfer of €1.5 billion from the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF), will require legislation.

In addition, the Summer Economic Statement confirmed the Government's intention to allocate €500 million per annum to the Rainy Day Fund in 2019 and subsequent years to 2021. This would imply, subject to the prevailing budgetary conditions, that the Rainy Day Fund would contain €3 billion by the end of this period.

In advance of any legislative steps and as announced in Budget 2018, I have transmitted a consultation paper prepared by my officials for consideration by the Oireachtas on establishing a Rainy Day Fund as was committed to in the 2017 Summer Economic Statement (SES) published in July.

The paper outlines some of the proposed operational modalities, including inter alia the trigger for deploying the fund, and the initial establishment of the fund. This consultation paper seeks to scope out some of the design and operational issues around the establishment of such a budgetary management mechanism. I would welcome the views of Oireachtas members on the issues set out in the paper by the end of this year.

Budget Measures

151. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the qualifying requirements for employees that will avail of the key employee engagement programme, KEEP; the qualifying requirements for the company availing of KEEP; when he expects state aid approval from the European Commission; if the Commission has provided preliminary approval of the scheme; if he anticipates issues from the European Commission relating to state aid rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44060/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As part of an ongoing process to support entrepreneurship and start-up companies generating employment, I announced on Budget day the introduction of the Key Employee Engagement Programme, a new, SME-focused, share-based remuneration incentive scheme.

Under this incentive, gains arising to the employee on the exercise of the share options will

be subject to tax when the employee subsequently disposes of the shares and will be subject to Capital Gains Tax, currently at 33%. In the absence of this incentive, the share-option gain would be liable to income tax, USC and PRSI at the time of the exercise of the option.

As referred to by the Deputy, State Aid approval is required as the scheme is a targeted incentive limited to companies of a certain size and/or type. Full State Aid approval has been sought, engagement with the Commission is ongoing and is expected to conclude shortly. I am not aware that there are any issues in this regard.

The 2018 Budget booklet contains information on the scheme (Annex E of the Tax Policy Changes section) and full details will be published in the Finance Bill later this week.

Question No. 152 answered with Question No. 149.

Question No. 153 answered with Question No. 145.

Referendum Data

154. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the costs of all referenda held since 2001; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43579/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The approximate costings for all referendums since 2001 are set out in the table with the exception of the referendums held in 2004 and 2011.

Month/Year	Referendum	Approximate Cost
June 2001	Prohibition of Death Penalty	€11.1m
	International Criminal Court	
	Treaty of Nice	
March 2002	Protection of Human Life in Pregnancy	€10.8m
October 2002	Treaty of Nice	€15.0m
June 2004	Citizenship	*
June 2008	Treaty of Lisbon	€22.2m
October 2009	Treaty of Lisbon	€17.5m
October 2011	Houses of Oireachtas Enquiries - Judges' Remuneration	*
May 2012	Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union	€14.8m
November 2012	Children	€12.8m
October 2013	Abolition of Seanad, Court of Appeal	€14.4m
May 2015	Marriage Equality & Age of Eligibility for Election to Office of the President	€14.8m

The referendums in those years were not taken on their own but were combined and ac-

counted for with European and Local Elections in 2004 and with a Presidential and by-election in 2011. It is not, therefore, possible to give an accurate cost of those referendums as there would have been an extensive sharing of staff and facilities for the different polls taken.

The Deputy may wish to note that when two or more election events are held on the same day, such as the 2015 Marriage Equality Bill & Age of Eligibility for Election to Office of The President, there are significant savings from the sharing of people and facilities.

Garda Station Closures

155. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the costs incurred in 2016 and to date in 2017, the estimated costs expected to be incurred by the end of 2017 and the estimated expenditure to be incurred in 2018 in respect of the decision to re-open Stepside Garda station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43674/17]

165. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the costs incurred by the Office of Public Works to date in 2017, the expected costs to be incurred in the remainder of 2017 and the estimated costs to be incurred in 2018 in respect of the reopening of Stepside Garda station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43675/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 155 and 165 together.

Stepaside Garda Station is in the full ownership of the Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland and it was closed on 14th March 2013 as part of the rationalisation programme of An Garda Síochána, as announced in the 2013 Policing Plan.

I am advised that the Commissioners appointed a company called Camelot to manage and maintain the property at Stepside. This is a Guardianship arrangement that was put in place in 2014 and is widely used in the commercial property sector. All routine maintenance costs associated with this arrangement are borne by Camelot.

My officials have confirmed that no expenditure has been incurred in 2016 nor 2017 to date, in relation to the proposed reopening of Stepside GS, nor have any costings been requested by or supplied to An Garda Síochána as yet, in relation to this proposal.

Community Sector High Level Forum

156. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the community sector high level forum last met; the progress it made regarding the issue of pensions for community employment supervisors; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Meetings of the Community Sector High Level Forum took place on 24 February and more recently 7 April 2017. The minutes of these meetings await formal approval by the parties to the Forum and will on such approval be publicly available on my Department's website. Previously approved meeting minutes are publicly available on my Department's website.

In considering the particular matter referred to, I must have regard to the costs and precedent of such an arrangement were one to be created. A scoping exercise is currently being progressed by officials in my Department and should be completed later this year.

It continues to be the position that state organisations are not the employer of the particular employees concerned and that it is not possible for the State to provide funding for such a scheme. The employees in question are, or were, employees of private companies notwithstanding the fact that the companies concerned are, or were, reliant on State funding.

Garda Station Closures

157. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform further to Parliamentary Question No. 99 of 4 October 2017, the process and method regarding the way in which a closed Garda station was repurposed and assigned to a body or group; if there was an application process; if the closed stations were publicly advertised as being available for alternative uses; if planning permission was sought for change of use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43433/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): I am advised by the Commissioners of Public Works (CPW) that the policy with regard to non-operational (vacant) State property, including the former Garda stations is to:

1. Identify if the property is required/suitable for alternative State use by both Government departments and the wider public sector.

2. If there is no other State use identified for a property, the Office of Public Works (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 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.

The Office of Public Works, in consultation with other State Agencies, identified alternative State uses for the eight properties listed in the table. There was no advertising process and the various State Bodies communicating with each other identified the alternatives uses. The relevant change of use planning is a matter for the new occupants of the properties.

Properties Retained or Under Consideration for Alternative State use (8)

No.	Name of Property and Location	Alternative State Use
1.	Former Garda Station, Barrack Street, Cork	Cork City Council
2.	Former Garda Station, Harcourt Terrace, Dublin	Department of Education and Skills for the construction of a new primary School.
3.	Former Garda Station, Kill, Co. Kildare	South West Kildare Partnership
4.	Former Garda Station, Loughlynn, Co. Roscommon	HSE for an Ambulance Base

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No.	Name of Property and Location	Alternative State Use
5.	Former Garda Station, Mary Street, Limerick	Limerick City and County Council
6.	Former Garda Station, Shanaglish, Galway	National Monuments Depot
7.	Former Garda Station, Valentia Island, Co. Kerry	Irish Coastguard
8.	Former Garda Station, Whitehall, Dublin	State Pathologist and Dublin City Coroner.

Following the closure of the 139 Garda stations as part of An Garda Síochána's rationalisation programme announced in An Garda Síochána's 2012 and 2013 Policing Plans, numerous community groups seeking to secure the former Garda station properties for community use approached the Office of Public Works.

The twelve community groups identified below were licenced to use the properties for community use, on the basis of a detailed application to the Commissioners of Public Works. The application process had to satisfy the Commissioners that each community group had the means to insure, maintain and manage the properties. In each case, there is a clause in the licence that, should there be a future State requirement for the property, the State can regain the use of the property.

The relevant change of use planning is a matter for each of the community groups to secure.

Assigned for Community Use (12)

No.	Name of Property and Location	Community Group
1.	Former Garda Station, Ballyskelligs, Co. Kerry	Coiste Forbartha na Sceilge.
2.	Former Garda Station, Ballycastle, Co. Mayo	Ballycastle Development Company.
3.	Former Garda Station, Beaufort, Co. Kerry	Beaufort Community Council.
4.	Former Garda Station, Castletownsend, Co. Cork	Castlehaven Nursing Association.
5.	Former Garda Station, Cootehall, Co. Roscommon	Cootehall Community Development Group.
6.	Former Garda Station, Donard, Co. Wicklow	Cumann Croise Deirge na hEireann/Glen of Imaal (Red Cross) Mountain Rescue.
7.	Former Garda Station, Glenisland, Co. Mayo	Glenisland Development Group.
8.	Former Garda Station, Kilgarvan, Co. Kerry	Kilgarvan Tidy Towns.
9.	Former Garda Station, Kilmeedy, Co. Limerick	Kilmeedy Community Development Group.
10.	Former Garda Station, Mulranny, Co. Mayo	Mulranny Community Futures Association.

No.	Name of Property and Location	Community Group
11.	Former Garda Station, Rush, Co. Dublin	Rush Musical Society.
12.	Former Garda Station, Tourmakeady, Co. Mayo	Coiste Cultur Teanga agus Forbartha Thur Mhic Eadaigh Teo.

Flood Prevention Measures

158. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43443/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Interdepartmental Flood Policy Co-ordination Group is considering the potential costs and benefits associated with the introduction of any potential individual property protection scheme. The Group is being informed by two different pilot projects, which are currently underway in Thomastown and Graiguenamanagh in County Kilkenny and Crossmolina in County Mayo.

In respect of the Kilkenny pilot, the OPW has funded the costs of a research and feasibility study into the potential provision of individual property protection. The consultants have furnished a report in relation to the options available for the pilot area that is currently under consideration by the OPW.

In Crossmolina, the OPW funded Mayo County Council to run a pilot scheme; consultants undertook surveys of individual properties and flood defences have been installed at 78 properties.

These pilots are now informing the potential costs, benefits and administrative arrangements for consideration. The Co-ordination Group's work, when completed, will be submitted to Government for consideration in the context of the merits of the introduction by Government of any scheme to support individual property protection measures. The Group has not identified the need for any further pilot schemes to inform their considerations

Flood Risk Assessments

159. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department has carried out investigations of flooding on a river (details supplied) in County Donegal; if there are plans to carry out works at this location; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43454/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The river referred to by the Deputy does not form part of any Arterial Drainage Scheme, which would fall under the remit of the Office of Public Works (OPW) under the 1945 Arterial Drainage Act. The OPW therefore has no responsibility for the maintenance of this river.

Local flooding issues are a matter, in the first instance, for each Local Authority to investigate and address, and Donegal County Council may carry out flood mitigation works using its own resources. The Council may also apply to the Office of Public Works for funding of flood

mitigation works under this Office's Minor Flood Mitigation Works and Coastal Protection Scheme. The purpose of this scheme is to provide funding to Local Authorities to undertake minor flood mitigation works or studies to address localised flooding and coastal protection problems within their administrative areas. Details of this scheme are on the OPW website, www.opw.ie

Criminal Assets Bureau

160. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of lands he has presented for sale in the past ten years that were previously subject to seizure by the Criminal Assets Bureau under the Proceeds of Crime Acts; the number of lands that were eventually sold; the amount of money that was raised from the sales; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43461/17]

161. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of properties he has presented for sale in the past ten years that were previously subject to seizure by the Criminal Assets Bureau under the Proceeds of Crime Act; the number of properties that eventually sold; the amount of money that was raised from the sales; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43462/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 160 and 161 together.

The objectives and functions of the Criminal Assets Bureau are set out in sections 4 and 5 respectively of the Criminal Assets Bureau Act 1996. In summary, they require the Bureau to:

- (i) identify and investigate the proceeds of criminal conduct;
- (ii) take action under the Proceeds of Crime Acts 1996-2016 to deny and deprive people of the benefit of assets that are the proceeds of criminal conduct by freezing, preserving and confiscating them;
- (iii) take action under the Revenue Acts to ensure that the proceeds of criminal activity are subject to tax; and
- (iv) investigate and determine claims for or in respect of benefits under the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act 1993.

The Proceeds of Crime Acts (as amended) also provides the legal framework underpinning the Bureau's powers to take all necessary actions, including the making of applications to the High Court, in relation to the seizing and securing of assets with a view to their disposal in due course in accordance with the provisions of that legislation.

The Deputy has sought specific information in relation to lands and properties. I would point out that Section 21 of the Criminal Assets Bureau Act 1996 requires the Bureau, through the Garda Commissioner, to provide an annual report of its activities to the Minister for Justice and Equality who is then required to lay copies of the report before each House of the Oireachtas. The Annual Reports, including the most recent one for 2016 which was published last July, are available in the Oireachtas library and on the website of An Garda Síochána. They also published on the website of the Department of Justice and Equality.

In Part 3 of the 2016 Report for instance, detailed information is provided in relation to the number of cases brought before the High Court under the various provisions of the Act; the

number and types of assets broken down by reference to categories such as jewellery, property, vehicles and cash/financial and their respective valuations; and the value of assets transferred to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform following the making of a disposal order by the High Court under Section 4 of the Proceeds of Crime Acts 1996 (as amended). Comparative data relating to the actions of the Bureau under the Revenue Acts and the Social Welfare Consolidation Act are also provided in these annual reports.

In order to mitigate any risk of harm, the Deputy will understand that it would not be appropriate to be specific about individual properties or individual lands which could be currently in the process of sale on behalf of the Bureau, or which have been purchased.

State Properties Data

162. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the properties and land owned by the Office of Public Works, by county. [43520/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The information sought by the Deputy is currently being collated. A detailed response will issue to the Deputy directly.

Pension Provisions

163. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if payment of an early retirement sum is available to deferred pensioners within the Civil Service pension scheme who have left employment in the service prior to reaching early retirement age but have a deferred entitlement (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43584/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Cost Neutral Early Retirement (CNER) is a facility which allows qualifying officers who wish to retire up to ten years before preserved (or minimum) retirement age to apply to receive immediate payment of lump sum and pension, as an alternative to preserved benefits. The lump sum and pension are reduced to make them the equivalent, in actuarial terms, of preserved benefits. Departments/Offices must consider applications for CNER in light of their business needs.

Applications for CNER cannot be made once the person has left their employment. In this case, because the individual concerned left the Civil Service in 1998, they are not eligible to avail of CNER. They will, of course, be eligible to claim payment of preserved pension benefits when they reach the minimum pension age of 60. There is no provision in the Civil Service Pension Scheme for early payment of the retirement lump sum.

More information on Cost Neutral Early Retirement can be found in the relevant Circular on my Department's website: <http://circulars.gov.ie/pdf/circular/finance/2005/10.pdf>

Flood Relief Schemes Expenditure

164. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the amount allocated to flood relief measures in each of the past four budgets and budget 2018; the amount that was spent during each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43653/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The following table sets out the budget allocation and expenditure in the Flood Risk Management area since 2014. The capital figures relate primarily to expenditure on the OPW's capital works programme on major and minor flood relief projects. The current figures relate primarily to expenditure on the OPW's programme of maintenance on completed arterial drainage schemes. The 2018 allocation shows a significant increase over previous years and is reflective of the Government's commitment to continued investment in this area over the period 2016-2021.

Programme A – Flood Risk Management Programme A – Flood Risk Management	Allocation	Expenditure
	€,000	€,000
2014 - Capital	45,000	44,358
2014 - Current	15,849	17,027
	60,849	61,385
2015 - Capital	61,750	48,767
2015 - Current	16,874	17,065
	78,624	65,832
*2016 - Capital	53,050	52,112
2016 - Current	17,859	18,285
	70,909	70,397
-	-	Projected Expenditure
2017 - Capital	43,119	44,335
2017 - Current	21,048	19,937
	64,167	64,272
2018 Capital	68,119	
2018 Current	21,299	
	89,418	
*€7m capital was carried over from 2015 to 2016		

Question No. 165 answered with Question No. 155.

Office of the Ombudsman Data

166. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the waiting list in the Office of the Ombudsman for cases to be dealt with; the different waiting lists for different categories of complaints, that is, in respect of local authorities, health issues, social welfare issues and each Government Department; the length of times it takes in each of these categories for the cases to be assigned to a person and an investigation to commence, where it is deemed necessary to have such an investigation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43880/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised that in 2016 the Office of the Ombudsman examined 3,110 complaints. I understand that 79% of these were completed within 3 months and 96% were completed within 12 months.

The Office of the Ombudsman sets itself annual case turnaround targets and progress against targets is closely monitored by senior management. The deployment of staff and case handling

structures and procedures are regularly reviewed by the Office's Operations Review Group to ensure that the Office continues to work with maximum efficiency while at the same time maintaining casework quality standards.

All complaints received by the Office of the Ombudsman, regardless of the sector to which they relate, are initially handled by caseworkers in the Office's Early Resolution Unit. This is to ensure that complaints are dealt with efficiently and effectively and where possible without the need for a formal examination or investigation. 70% of cases received are dealt with in this manner.

The process following Early Resolution is Examination. This is where the complaint requires further information from either the Public Body or the Complainant or both and cannot be closed quickly. Approximately 30% of the complaints received move to this stage. Only a small minority of complaints go forward for investigation.

Broadly speaking cases are assigned in the order in which they are received regardless of the category. As the service is demand led, the length of time it takes to assign any particular case within the Examination Unit, depends on the availability of caseworker capacity at any given time.

More complex cases are assigned to the most skilled and experienced caseworkers and inevitably take longer to complete. The assignment of cases is discussed on a weekly basis and is closely monitored by Senior Management within the Office of the Ombudsman.

Community Sector High Level Forum

167. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the make up of the community sector high level forum; the members of the forum; the chair of the forum; the remit and the schedule for the forum reporting to his Department; if it is examining Labour Court recommendation 19293 regarding pension provision for community employment supervisors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43939/17]

168. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason the Labour Court recommendation 19293 regarding pension provision for community employment supervisors has not yet been implemented; the barriers to implementation; the cost of implementation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43940/17]

169. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when he expects the community sector high level forum to report on the Labour Court recommendation 19293 regarding pension provision for community employment supervisors; if the minutes of the forum's meetings are available; the cost of running the forum; when he expects it to complete its work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43941/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 167 to 169, inclusive, together.

The Community Sector High Level Forum was reconvened in 2015 to give consideration to a number of issues including the issue to which the Deputy refers. Meetings took place on 24 February and more recently 7 April 2017. The minutes of these meetings await formal approval by the parties to the Forum and will on such approval be publicly available on my Department's website. Previously approved meeting minutes are publicly available on my Department's website and contain the names of the participants on the Forum.

In considering the particular matter referred to, I must have regard to the costs and precedent of such an arrangement were one to be created. A scoping exercise is currently being progressed by officials in my Department and should be completed later this year.

It continues to be the position that state organisations are not the employer of the particular employees concerned and that it is not possible for the State to provide funding for such a scheme. The employees in question are, or were, employees of private companies notwithstanding the fact that the companies concerned are, or were, reliant on State funding.

Third Level Funding

170. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the programme for Government commitments on third level funding. [43633/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Higher education is a central part of our plan as a Government to support a strong economy and deliver a fair society and I have taken a number of steps towards achieving this important objective.

As committed to in the Programme for Government, I have referred the Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Skills. The Report sets out a number of proposals to develop a long term sustainable funding mode. I look forward to receiving the Committee's recommendations. This will assist in facilitating informed decision-making for the future direction of funding for higher education.

While the Committee are undertaking this important work, I have been working in the interim to secure additional funding for higher education. This commitment is reflected in last week's Budget 2018 announcement in which the higher education sector will benefit from a total investment package of €60m in additional funding in 2018. This funding is on top of the €36.5m that I secured for 2017 and which is being provided again in 2018. In total, we will be investing €100m more in higher and further education in 2018 than in 2016.

This additional funding will allow for targeted initiatives in higher education including skills programmes, performance and innovation funding, technological university development and apprenticeship costs in the sector. It will also allow for places to be provided for 2,100 additional students in 2018.

It should also be noted that an independent Expert Panel appointed by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) have reviewed the Recurrent Grant Allocation Model (RGAM) with a view to making recommendations on the most appropriate model for the future. A Report on the review has been finalized by the Expert Panel and has been submitted to my Department for consideration.

As set out in the Programme for Government, this comprehensive approach is being taken in order to achieve a sustainable funding model for the higher education sector going forward. It will be important to build broad political and societal consensus in realising this goal and my Department and I continue to work towards that end.

Schools Building Projects Status

171. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the new school building for a school (details supplied); when the work is due to take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43386/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, a building project for the school referred to is included in the 6 Year Capital Programme (2016-2021).

My Department is currently finalising the project brief and once this process is complete, my Department will be in further contact with the school. The project will be progressed into the architectural planning process without delay when the brief has been finalised.

Special Educational Needs Staff

172. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to amend the workings of the special needs assistant, SNA, supplementary panel to bring it into line with the panel which operates for primary school teachers (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43403/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The supplementary assignment arrangements for Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) were established on foot of proposals brought forward by the Labour Relations Commission (LRC) when the Haddington Road Agreement was being agreed. These supplementary assignment arrangements for SNAs continue to operate under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018 - 2020, and both unions representing SNAs, namely SIPTU and IMPACT, have signed up to that agreement. As set out in the LRC proposals, the supplementary assignment arrangements for SNAs only apply to current SNAs who are notified that they are to be made redundant. Accordingly, the purpose of these arrangements is to facilitate eligible SNAs who are being made redundant by one employer in filling SNA vacancies that may become available in another school/ETB. When an employer has an SNA vacancy to fill, they must undertake the recruitment process in accordance with the provisions outlined in Circular 0042/2017 “Recruitment of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) –Supplementary Assignment Arrangements for the 2017/18 School Year”.

In addition, under the provisions of Circular 0042/2017, where a school/ETB has an additional allocation of SNA hours/posts, then that additional allocation of hours/posts must be offered to any existing part-time SNAs in that employment, in order of seniority, before the employer has recourse to recruitment.

These arrangements give SNAs the alternative of redeployment instead of redundancy and give SNAs greater stability and a better chance of a full-hours contract, while at the same time ensuring that schools can continue to recruit SNAs with the right skills and experience to meet the needs of the children in their care.

The arrangements are reviewed annually by the unions, school management bodies and the Department, with the assistance of an independent chairperson, and this annual review enables the parties to examine and resolve issues arising in the operation of the arrangements.

On 5 July 2017, I announced that 975 additional Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) were to be allocated to schools over the period September to December 2017, a 7.5% increase in SNA numbers in order to meet the level of assessed demand. This announcement brings the total number of SNAs to 13,990, representing an increase in the total numbers of SNAs of 32%, from 10,575 to 13,990 since 2011.

In addition, and as announced as part of Budget 2018, funding is being allocated for the recruitment of over 1,090 new Special Needs Assistants in 2018 (based on current forecasts), including some 130 posts which will be filled in the period between January and June next year, with the remainder being appointed from September 2018. This brings the total number of

SNAs to over 15,000.

It is inevitable that redundancies will occur in individual schools, due to circumstances such as a special educational needs pupil moving to another school, moving from first to second level, or second to third level, etc. However, overall and due to the significant increase in SNA numbers since 2011 and the introduction of the Supplementary Assignment Panel Arrangements, SNAs have benefited from greater stability in their employment. I have no plans to amend the workings of the SNA supplementary panel to bring it into line with the panel which operates for primary school teachers.

Departmental Bodies Data

173. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the State bodies or boards that fall under the remit of his Department; and the number of members of each State body or board who are not qualified within the field in which the board or body has oversight. [43413/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): For the Deputy's information details of the State Bodies that fall under the remit of my Department, including details of board appointments to the respective State Boards are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://education.ie/en/The-Department/Agencies/>.

The Deputy should note that individuals may be nominated for appointment by various organisations arising from the terms in the relevant Statutes of the Body concerned and accordingly board appointments while made by me are not in all cases made at my discretion.

In line with the guidelines for appointments to State Boards, the process for filling vacancies on State Boards under the aegis of my Department is now generally managed by the Public Appointments Service (PAS). Applications are made through the dedicated website www.Stateboards.ie. An assessment process is undertaken by PAS leading to the creation of a list of candidates suitable for appointments to Boards.

Springboard Programme

174. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to implement a review of the eligibility guidelines for acceptance onto the Springboard+ programme in view of the continuing fall in unemployment, the increase in the non-EU population and recent changes enabling asylum seekers to participate in the workforce; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43436/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Springboard+ which incorporates the ICT skills conversion programme, is a targeted initiative which is primarily used to provide funding for higher education courses aimed at meeting the need for in-demand skills in the economy and supporting jobseekers to return to employment.

In 2017 the eligibility criteria was expanded to include homemakers and those in employment including those in self-employment who wish to upskill, reskill or cross skill in the Bio-pharma/Med Tech sector and those in employment, or self-employment in the ICT sector who wish to upskill from a level 7 to a level 8 qualification.

The eligibility criteria for Springboard+ are reviewed by my Department on a regular basis in consultation with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department

of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

In drawing up eligibility criteria for those in employment, a decision was made to align the criteria with that of the existing ICT Conversion Courses under Springboard+ and the Department's Free Fees Initiative for third level education, i.e. a student must have been ordinarily resident in an EU/EEA/Swiss state for at least 3 of the 5 years prior to entry to their third level course of study in order to qualify to participate on the programme. This rule applies to all individuals regardless of their citizenship.

School Transport Provision

175. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to address the lack of school bus places being made available for children in 2017; and if the transport supports required by a person (details supplied) will be made available to the person. [43442/17]

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 recognised mainstream or special school that is or can be resourced, to meet their special educational needs under Department of Education and Skills' criteria.

Bus Éireann has reported that the school transport service commenced on 9 October 2017.

Capitation Grants

176. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to restore the capitation grant for primary schools to €200 as a matter of priority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43451/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I do recognise the need to improve capitation funding for primary schools having regard to the reductions that were necessary over recent years.

Budget 2018 marks the second year of major reinvestment in the education sector, as we continue to implement the Action Plan for Education, which has the central aim to make the Irish Education and Training service the best in Europe within a decade. In 2018, the budget for the Department of Education will increase by €554 million to over €10 billion.

Due to the many competing demands for the available funding it was not possible to make progress in Budget 2018 on restoring capitation funding to schools. Capitation funding remains a priority for me to address as part of the Action Plan.

The process is underway for restoring grant funding that is used by schools to fund the salaries of ancillary staff. The ancillary grant was increased by €6 in 2016 and €5 in 2017 in order to enable primary schools implement the arbitration salary increase for grant funded school

secretaries and caretakers and to also implement the restoration of salary for cleaners arising from the unwinding of FEMPI legislation.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

177. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a person (details supplied) will be granted access to a special needs assistant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43486/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), which is an independent statutory agency, is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support. The criteria by which SNA support is allocated to pupils is set out in my Department's Circular 0030/2014.

In considering applications for SNA supports for individual pupils, the SENOs take account of the pupils' needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additional support is needed or whether the school might reasonably be expected to meet the needs of the pupils from its current level of resources. SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource.

All schools have been advised of their allocations for SNA support for the 2017/18 school year. Details of SNA allocations which have been made to schools have been published by the NCSE on their website at <http://ncse.ie/statistics>.

Where a school has received its allocation of SNA support for 2017/18, but wishes new enrolments or assessments to be considered, which were not taken into account when the initial allocation was made, they may continue to make applications to the NCSE.

The NCSE Appeals Process may be invoked by a parent or a school where it is considered that a child was not granted access to SNA support on the grounds that my Department's policy was not met in accordance with Circular 0030/2014. Schools may also appeal a decision, where the school considers that the NCSE, in applying my Department policy, has not allocated the appropriate level of SNA supports to the school to meet the special educational and/or care needs of the children concerned. The closing date for receipt of appeals was 29th September 2017.

All schools have the contact details of their local SENO and parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available at <http://ncse.ie/seno-contact-list>.

As the matter raised in this question refers to an individual child, I have arranged for the NCSE to reply directly to the Deputy.

School Accommodation Provision

178. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the construction of a permanent school building for a school (details supplied) will commence; when the temporary accommodation for two of the school's classes will be in place enabling the classes temporarily located in a school (details supplied) to move back to the Rathborne, Dublin

15, site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43488/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Officials in my Department have been working towards the acquisition of a permanent site to meet the needs of the school to which the Deputy refers.

With regard to permanent accommodation, my Department has reached agreement with the landowner of the permanent site and the acquisition is currently progressing through the conveyancing stage. Following the completion of the acquisition, the architectural planning process for the provision of a new permanent building for the school in question will commence.

With regard to temporary arrangements, as the Deputy may be aware, this is a developing school which is in rented temporary accommodation in Rathborne, Dublin 15 and requires two additional classrooms in the current school year. A Consultant Architect was appointed in relation to the provision of additional temporary accommodation for the school and it is anticipated that the final decision to grant planning permission will issue from the local authority shortly. This project is a high priority for my Department and work is ongoing to provide the additional prefab accommodation at this location as soon as possible in the current school term.

In the interim, arrangements were put in place in consultation with the patron body to temporarily accommodate two of the classes in a nearby school building (referred to by the Deputy) as a short-term arrangement, pending delivery of the additional prefab accommodation. This school which is currently being used for interim arrangements is a new 16-classroom school which opened in its permanent accommodation only last year with most of its purpose-built rooms available for use. Once the additional prefabs are installed, the classes will move back to the rented accommodation in Rathborne, Dublin 15.

State Examinations

179. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the impact of multiple examination components on the performance of leaving certificate art students as compared with other subjects that have fewer components; the detail of the distribution of marks and grades in each of the four different components; and if his attention has been drawn to concerns that there is grade deflation within the leaving certificate arts examination system. [43489/17]

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 the Deputy's query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply.

Teachers' Remuneration

180. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a person (details supplied) will be correctly assessed by his Department's salaries division and not subjected to emergency tax. [43500/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): An official from my Department has been in contact with the teacher referred to and outlined the current position to her. The Tax Certificate details have been updated on the payroll system. The appropriate deductions will take effect from her next pay issue and if any arrears are due they will be paid at

that point.

Teachers' Remuneration

181. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the pay scale of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry will be reviewed to reflect the person's level of teaching service. [43513/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Since October 2010, the teacher referred to, has been teaching as a substitute teacher in an unqualified capacity. He has been registered with the Teaching Council as a qualified Primary School teacher since 3rd October 2016. He is entitled to be paid a qualified rate of pay as a primary school teacher with effect from that date. Since his date of registration with the Teaching Council as a qualified primary school teacher and whilst he has been working in a substitute capacity in a primary school, he has been paid the correct rate of pay on the incremental salary scale.

Psychological Assessments

182. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when recommendations in a psychological report for a person (details supplied) with learning difficulties will be implemented. [43523/17]

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

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

I have made enquiries in the matter raised by the Deputy and find that the child in question has not been brought to the attention of the currently assigned NEPS psychologist. If the parents of the child have specific concerns about his educational progress I would advise in the first instance that they speak to the Principal of the school with a view to their raising these concerns with the assigned NEPS psychologist in regard to any direct input into the case.

School Staff

183. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 183 of 3 October 2017, if the actual enrolment figures relating to the

school referred to have now been received by the appeals board; if a decision has been made to uphold the school's appeal in this instance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43525/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September. The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board.

The staffing schedule operates in a clear and transparent manner and treats all similar types of schools equally irrespective of location.

The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an application for consideration by the Appeals Board at its April 2017 meeting under the small school criterion. The appeal was provisionally approved by the Appeals Board pending confirmation of the actual enrolments on 30 September 2017. However it now appears that the actual pupil numbers on that date have not come in as projected by the school and therefore this post will be suppressed on 27 October 2017.

The Primary Staffing Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

Electric Vehicles

184. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to install electric charge facilities for schools that wish to become more green. [43562/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the potential for improved energy provision in schools is under continued review by my Department's Energy Research Programme through research and monitoring of improvements in technology and the market place.

It is within this programme that a technical review of providing electric charge facilities for schools for charging electric vehicles by school personnel is underway within my Department. This review will consider a number of issues associated with the provision including procurement options, service provision options, legislation and installation and maintenance costs. It is envisaged that this review will be completed during the first quarter of 2018.

My Department will also consider any outputs from the interdepartmental Low Emissions Vehicle (LEV) Task Force which is charged with presenting a range of measures and options to the Government that will assist in accelerating the deployment of LEVs in Ireland.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

185. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review the case of a person (details supplied) with special needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43582/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), which is an independent statutory agency, is responsible, through

its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support. The criteria by which SNA support is allocated to pupils is set out in my Department's Circular 0030/2014.

In considering applications for SNA supports for individual pupils, the SENOs take account of the pupils' needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additional support is needed or whether the school might reasonably be expected to meet the needs of the pupils from its current level of resources. SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource.

All schools have been advised of their allocations for SNA support for the 2017/18 school year. Details of SNA allocations which have been made to schools have been published by the NCSE on their website at <http://ncse.ie/statistics>.

Where a school has received its allocation of SNA support for 2017/18, but wishes new enrolments or assessments to be considered, which were not taken into account when the initial allocation was made, they may continue to make applications to the NCSE.

The NCSE Appeals Process may be invoked by a parent or a school where it is considered that a child was not granted access to SNA support on the grounds that my Department's policy was not met in accordance with Circular 0030/2014. Schools may also appeal a decision, where the school considers that the NCSE, in applying my Department policy, has not allocated the appropriate level of SNA supports to the school to meet the special educational and/or care needs of the children concerned. The closing date for receipt of appeals was 29th September 2017.

All schools have the contact details of their local SENO and parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available at <http://ncse.ie/seno-contact-list>.

As the matter raised in this question refers to an individual child, I have arranged for the NCSE to reply directly to the Deputy.

Psychological Assessments

186. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a person (details supplied) will receive a National Educational Psychological Service educational assessment; the reason for the delay in receiving an assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43583/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can inform the Deputy that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), in common with many other psychological services and best international practice, has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution oriented consultative approach to maximise positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consul-

tation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment.

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

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

Student Support Schemes

187. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there are funds within his Department to assist a person (details supplied) who is attending college overseas to become a doctor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43642/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Under the student grant scheme, eligible candidates may receive funding, provided they are attending an approved course at an approved institution and meet the prescribed conditions of funding, including those which relate to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment (progression) and means.

To satisfy the terms and conditions of the Student Grant Scheme in relation to progression, a student must be moving from year to year within a course having successfully completed the previous year or be transferring from one course to another where the award for the subsequent course is of a higher level than the previous course.

It would appear from the information provided by the Deputy, that the student in question will, among other things, not meet the progression criterion.

However, 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, including approved undergraduate and postgraduate courses in EU Member States and in non-EU countries.

Further information on this tax relief is available from the Revenue Commissioners at www.revenue.ie.

Institutes of Technology

188. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of full-time and part-time students, respectively, attending Waterford IT and Carlow IT; the number of full-time and part-time staff employed at the colleges, respectively; the number of full-time staff employed at both colleges with masters or PhD qualifications; the number of students from County Wexford who attend Carlow IT and Waterford IT, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43682/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information requested by the Deputy is outlined in the table.

Students/Staff	Institute of Technology Carlow	Waterford Institute of Technology
Number of Full Time Students	4290	6313
Number of Part Time Students	2684	1237
Full Time Staff (full-time equivalent)	431.45	628
Part-Time Staff (full-time equivalent)	90.93	268.84
Number of full time academic staff with Masters or higher qualifications *	98%	89%
Number of students from County Wexford	1105	1065
* From System Performance institutional profiles 2013/2014		

Teacher Data

189. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary and secondary teachers here; the target number of each envisaged by budget 2018; the target date of recruitment for these posts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43731/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Budget 2018 marks the second year of major reinvestment in the education sector, as we continue to implement the Action Plan for Education, which has the central aim to make the Irish Education and training service the best in Europe within a decade.

Budget 2018 provides for an additional 1280 teaching posts in the 2018/19 school year. This includes a one point improvement in the staffing schedule in primary schools which brings the position to the most favourable ever seen at primary level.

These changes will come into effect in September 2018 for the 2018/19 school year.

The Statistics Section of my Department's website contains extensive information relating to teacher numbers.

Student Grant Scheme Expenditure

190. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which the additional funding for postgraduate grants in budget 2018 will be spent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43821/17]

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

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

The €4 million will cover the cost of this measure in 2017 and has been added to the baseline for future years. The additional €3 million secured in Budget 2018, will meet the rolling cost of the implementation of this measure.

Summer Works Scheme

191. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the summer works scheme will be reopened for applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43856/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The current Summer Works Scheme (SWS) is being applied on a multi-annual basis. The Deputy will also be aware that nearly 50% of schools have applied for inclusion under the scheme which reflects a very high demand. Details of successful school applicants in respect of Categories 1 to 6 are published on my Department's website *www.education.ie*. Almost €80 million has been approved to date under the Summer Works Scheme in respect of over 640 school projects in categories 1-6. The 2018 budgetary provision will allow my Department meet the costs of summer works projects already approved, the assessment of applications in the remaining Categories 7-10 is reliant on the availability of funding.

The announcement of a further Summer Works Scheme in 2018 will be a matter for consideration at that time.

Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board

192. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the name, position and grade of all Caranua staff; the vacancies at the organisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43867/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Section 17 of the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012 provides that Caranua shall appoint, with the consent of the Minister of Education and Skills and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, the number of staff as it may from time to time determine. The approved staffing complement is currently 24.6 full time equivalent posts. Staff are appointed to equivalent civil service grades and are placed on the appropriate authorised salary scale. Relevant details are set out in the following table. I understand that there are currently three vacancies in Caranua's authorised staffing complement and I am advised that a recruitment process is currently underway to fill two of these posts and that the recruitment process to fill the third post will commence shortly.

No	Position	Grade
1	Chief Executive Officer	Principal Officer
1	Director of Services	Assistant Principal Officer
12	Application Advisor	Executive Officer
0.6 WTE	Finance Assistant	Executive Officer

No	Position	Grade
1	Director of Finance & Administration	Assistant Principal Officer
1	Head of Administration	Higher Executive Officer
5	Administrative Assistant	Clerical Officer
2	Quality, Compliance and Information Officer	Executive Officer
1	Head of Communications & Engagement	Higher Executive Officer

Residential Institutions Statutory Fund

193. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the refusal by Caranua to provide funeral expenses for a person (details supplied) who was a survivor of a residential institution and following five days' testimony at the commission received a payment from the redress board in view of the fact that Caranua has amended its criteria to include funeral expenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43868/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Caranua, the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board, is an independent statutory body established pursuant to the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012 to oversee the use of the cash contributions of up to €110 million, pledged by the religious congregations, to support the needs of survivors of institutional child abuse. The determination of the criteria by reference to which Caranua may make decisions in respect of applications to it is a statutory function of the organisation itself and I have no role in that process. Furthermore, I have no role in Caranua's day to day operations including in relation to the processing of individual applications. I should point out also that decisions of Caranua may be appealed to an independent Appeals Officer appointed under section 21 of the 2012 Act and that a person who is affected by a decision of an Appeals Officer may appeal to the High Court on a point of law.

As no details were supplied with the Deputy's question I suggest that, if she wishes to raise a particular case, she makes direct contact with Caranua using the dedicated email address for members of the Houses of the Oireachtas (oireachtas@caranua.ie).

Education and Training Boards Administration

194. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on payments for members of education and training boards (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43882/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Travel & Subsistence arrangements for ETB Board and Committee members have been aligned with public sector norms in accordance with revised Department of Public Expenditure and Reform arrangements. This was the main driver of the revisions in the ETB sector.

These revised T&S arrangements took effect from 1 April 2017. The revised arrangements were also put in place across the public sector, including in the local authority sector, to which the ETBs have been traditionally linked. The T&S arrangements are outlined in Department Circular 0039/2017.

The Deputy will appreciate that it is not desirable to deviate from public sector norms in relation to travel and subsistence arrangements. However, my Department has indicated that it will be happy to receive feedback in due course on any effects arising from the changes after they have had time to bed in.

Schools Facilities

195. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the safety concerns regarding traffic outside a school (details supplied) such as no safety railing between the school and the car park during pick up and drop off; the funding available to implement safety mechanisms for this school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43934/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): To date the school to which the Deputy refers has not applied to my Department for funding to address safety concerns regarding traffic outside the school during pick up and drop off times.

The mechanism for applying for funding for works of this nature is my Department's Summer Works Scheme and it is open to the school authority to apply for these works under a future Summer Works Scheme.

In the interim if the school authority identify health and safety works that require immediate attention they should submit an Emergency Works Application form, which is available on my Department's website.

Site Acquisitions

196. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress which has been made with regard to locating a permanent site for a school (details supplied) recently awarded in the patronage competition for the Pelletstown, Scribblestown and Dublin 7 area; if he has directed Dublin City Council to actively engage with landowners with a view to securing such a site; the measures which will be taken to accommodate this school in the interim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43961/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware the project to which she refers is included on my Department's capital programme.

A potential permanent site has been identified and this is being progressed.

In the interim my Department will continue to liaise with the school patron with regard to existing temporary accommodation arrangements.

Schools Building Projects

197. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the case of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43970/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that my Department has received correspondence from the school in question relating to a proposed build-

ing project at the school. The correspondence is being considered and my Department will be in further contact with the school authority when this process has been completed.

Schools Property

198. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if financial assistance will be provided for a school (details supplied) to carry out essential maintenance works. [43971/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I understand that the school contacted my Department today, Tuesday 17th October, relating to damage caused to its accommodation during the recent Storm Ophelia. The school was advised to contact its insurance company.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has published information for schools that have experienced or encountered difficulties or damage, following Storm Ophelia on my Department's website *www.education.ie*

Direct Provision System

199. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 95 of 11 October 2017, if there is education, training or other classes available to adults living in direct provision other than English language classes in view of the fact that many residents may already be proficient in English; if consideration has been given to such provision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43990/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Adult participants in the protection process may avail of free access to adult literacy and English language supports. They may also access programmes under the Post Leaving Certificate Programme on payment of the fees applicable to non-EU/EEA nationals. In certain circumstances financial supports for access to such courses are available to students who meet the criteria of my Department's Pilot Support Scheme for access for further and higher education by persons in the protection process. Details of this scheme are available on my Department's website at the following link:

<https://www.education.ie/en/Learners/Services/Pilot-Support-Scheme/Pilot-Support-Scheme.html>

Teacher Recruitment

200. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the lack of modern language teachers available for employment, especially in the case of a school (details supplied) in County Wexford; if his Department has examined the reasons for a shortage of modern language teachers available for employment at second level schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44010/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has been made aware that there may be difficulties for schools in recruiting teachers of certain subjects, including teachers of modern languages. My Department is not aware of the specific case of the school to which the Deputy refers.

I might draw the Deputy's attention to the final report of the Technical Working Group on teacher supply, 'Striking the Balance', which was published on 9 June 2017. The report focusses on the development of a model of primary teacher supply, while outlining the work which will be required to establish a sustainable long term model of post primary teacher supply. The report sets out an approach to planning the work necessary to develop a model for achieving a better balance between teacher supply and demand in the medium to long term.

Officials of my Department are now considering how the development of a model can be progressed, from within available resources. The necessary actions will include engagement with the HEA in order to ensure that the supply of teachers meets demand and there is the correct balance of teachers in each of the various subject areas at post primary level, including for modern languages, as well as measures to address data requirements, particularly at post primary level.

The Deputy may wish to note that a key commitment in my Department's Action Plan for Education is the publication of a Foreign Languages in Education Strategy. This is a priority issue for me in the context of my goal of making Ireland's education system the best in Europe. The Strategy recognises that to ensure a supply of graduates with foreign language competences for the education sector, there will need to be a greater uptake of foreign languages in higher education. My Department is currently finalising the strategy, which, it is intended, will be published shortly.

Schools Building Projects Status

201. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress being made towards the delivery of a building programme for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44016/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A building project for the school to which the Deputy refers is included in my Department's Six Year Capital Plan and my Department is currently liaising with the local authority with a view to finalising the acquisition of the site.

Once the acquisition is finalised, the architectural planning process for the provision of a new school building for the school can be initiated.

Schools Building Projects Status

202. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress of works on a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44027/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A major school building project to provide new accommodation for the school referred to by the Deputy has recently been authorised by my Department to proceed to tender for the appointment of a Building Contractor. Assuming no significant issues arise during the tender process, my Department expects that the project will progress to site early in 2018

Departmental Bodies Data

203. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

the State bodies or boards that fall under the remit of his Department; and the number of members of each State body or board who are not qualified within the field in which the board or body has oversight. [43416/17]

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

Northern Ireland

204. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding the negotiations being held in Northern Ireland; and his views on whether the Executive will be reinstated. [43447/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government is determined, as co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, to do everything in our power to ensure that all of its institutions are operating effectively, including the devolved Assembly and power-sharing Executive in Northern Ireland and the North-South Ministerial Council.

I remain in regular contact with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, James Brokenshire, and the political parties, as both Governments continue work to support and encourage the parties in achieving the urgent and essential objective of forming a new Executive within the mandate of the current Assembly.

I have welcomed the intensified and sustained engagement between the DUP and Sinn Féin over the last number of weeks in order to resolve key differences which have proved an obstacle to them forming a new Executive. As the two parties mandated to lead the next Executive, it is for them in the first instance to establish a basis on which a new administration can work. I have continued to encourage the parties to stretch themselves to reach an agreement which is consistent with their electoral mandates and which reflects the principles of mutual respect, parity of esteem and partnership.

I do not underestimate the differences that remain to be resolved in order for such an agreement to be reached. However, I believe that these can and must be resolved in the period immediately ahead. Time is now a very real factor, with budgetary and other necessary decisions looming in relation to the provision of public services in Northern Ireland. These need to be addressed by effective and sustainable devolved government in Northern Ireland, as provided for under the Good Friday Agreement. The essential work of the North South Ministerial Council also needs to urgently recommence, not least in the context of Brexit.

I am hopeful that the political parties will urgently and successfully conclude their discussions which will allow the Executive and Assembly, and indeed all of the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement, to function effectively.

On behalf of the Government, I will continue to make all possible efforts, working with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the political parties, to support an agreement on the formation of a new power-sharing Executive in the period immediately ahead.

Revenue Commissioners Reports

205. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has received the report of the Revenue Commissioners on Brexit that was leaked on 8 October 2017; if so, if he has discussed same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43448/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the report to which the Deputy refers. I understand that this was a draft internal working paper and preliminary analysis carried out by the Revenue Commissioners, which dates from September 2016. Therefore, as it was an internal report, I would not have expected to receive it. I understand that a redacted version of this document has since been published on the website of the Revenue Commissioners.

As Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade with special responsibility for Brexit I am working intensively with colleagues from across all Departments to ensure a coordinated Government response to Brexit.

With the agreement of the Taoiseach I have mandated the establishment of new cross-Departmental coordination structures, chaired at very senior level by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. These are now fully operational and represent a frequent and active channel through which all relevant Departments, including the Revenue Commissioners, are providing their input to the Government's wider response to Brexit, including its priorities for the ongoing Article 50 negotiations between the EU and the UK.

Repatriation Costs

206. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to introduce a scheme that would financially support, with regard to the repatriation costs, the families of Irish citizens who have died abroad. [43459/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Department of Foreign Affairs responds to around 3,000 consular emergency cases each year, and the highest priority is always given to those involving the deaths of Irish citizens overseas. In 2016 my Department assisted in 250 such cases. Sadly, this number looks likely to increase in 2017 and could be around 300.

My Department and its staff are well trained and experienced in the provision of such consular assistance, and the quality of the work carried out by officials in this area is highly regarded. I am very proud of the achievement of my Department's Consular Directorate in being awarded the 2016 Public Service Excellence and Innovation Award in the Customer Service Excellence category.

In cases involving the death of an Irish citizen abroad, my Department, and our Embassies and Consulates, provide assistance to families in a range of areas which can include liaising with local authorities on issues such as formal identification of the deceased and post-mortem examinations; assisting families to obtain death certificates and navigating local systems and processes; liaising with local police where the death is sudden or suspicious and an investigation is required; providing lists of reputable local English-speaking undertakers; assisting with the completion and filing of documentation required for the repatriation of remains; assisting families in contacts with insurance agents; and arranging for the storage and repatriation of personal effects of deceased persons.

My Department does not provide financial assistance in such cases and has no budget provision for such assistance. I am not aware of any country where the Government operates a scheme providing direct financial assistance to families who suffer a bereavement overseas, and there are no plans for the introduction of any such scheme here.

In many cases where a death occur abroad and the family wish to bring the remains home to Ireland, costs associated with repatriation of remains are covered by insurance policies.

The importance of taking out comprehensive travel insurance is a message which my Department seeks to convey to Irish citizens at every opportunity, and we also ask all public representatives to share that message with their constituents where possible.

In exceptional circumstances, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection can make an exceptional needs payment to a family to assist with funeral costs in Ireland, but this does not cover repatriation of remains from overseas.

The Kevin Bell Repatriation Trust Fund (KBRTF), a private organisation which raises funds from the public, provides assistance with repatriation of remains, and my Department and the Trust often work together on specific cases as appropriate.

Diplomatic Representation Expenditure

207. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the announcement that Ireland will open five new diplomatic missions between 2018 and 2019; the timeframe for opening these new embassies and consulates; the estimated cost of each mission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43737/17]

208. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the way in which the €2 million allocated in budget 2018 to expanding Ireland's global footprint will be utilised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43738/17]

209. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the way in which the €3.5 million allocated in budget 2018 to the Article 50 negotiations will be utilised; if it will result in additional staff in his Department; the details of the way in which the money will be spent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43739/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 207 to 209, inclusive, together.

The opening of three new embassies in Santiago, Chile, Bogotá, Colombia and Amman, Jordan and two new consulates general in Vancouver, Canada and Mumbai, India between 2018 and 2019 is an important first step in doubling Ireland's global footprint by 2025 and building our capacity to respond to the complexity of the challenges we face in the years ahead.

This phase of the expansion will further support Ireland's foreign trade and inward investment drive and help position Ireland for growth in new markets as well as enhance the promotion of our values and the protection of our citizens around the world. Decisions on the locations of the new missions were informed by the trade and investment strategy, "Ireland Connected" and consistent with forthcoming Asia-Pacific and Americas Strategies across government. The locations for the new missions were identified on the basis of likely impact.

Given the wide variety of local circumstances involved in establishing each new Mission and the need to consult with the host country Governments, it is not possible to provide further detail on the timetable for openings at this stage.

The estimated cost of each mission will depend on a range of factors including staffing and accommodation. The new missions will likely have from one to three staff from HQ with local support staff. The €2 million allocated in Budget 2018 will cover initial outlays incurred next year. My Department will also need to ensure that the vital services infrastructure and policy support capacity at headquarters is adequate. However, I anticipate that all necessary arrangements will be completed in a timely way.

Ireland will need to grow its presence in fast-growing emerging countries as well as deepen our market penetration in more developed markets and our diplomatic missions overseas will continue to be crucial in this. The priority of my Department, as across government and state agencies, will be to support the growth of Ireland's share of international trade, employment and investment and the diversification of our markets where needed.

Brexit is undoubtedly one of the most significant challenges the country will face in the coming years. The Government has been clear that our priorities are to minimise the impact on our trade and economy; to protect the Good Friday Agreement and the gains of the peace process; to maintain the Common Travel Area and to help shape the future direction of Europe. The resources allocated to the expansion of our mission network internationally are an important strand in helping to mitigate the risks posed by Brexit to our economy including through diversification of trade with emerging markets and foreign direct investment flows. At the same time, protecting our economic interests in terms of trade and investment with the UK will be a key priority.

Our objectives also need to be pursued through seeking the best possible outcome for Ireland from the ongoing EU-UK negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the EU. To this end, the additional funding allocated in budget 2018 allocated to my Department for the Article 50 negotiations will support ongoing work by Ireland's Brexit teams in Dublin, Brussels, Berlin, Paris and London and at Ireland's missions across the EU, including through additional staff resources in due course. These increased resources will also help to ensure our strong influence on the debate underway on the future of Europe where we will be seeking to ensure that the EU continues to deliver for our citizens as we address the many challenges of growing threats to the rules-based trading order in a globalised world.

Overseas Development Aid Expenditure

210. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the way in which the €13 million allocated to official development assistance, ODA, in budget 2018 will affect our ODA to GNP target; the resulting estimated ODA as a percentage of GNP as a result of this increase; the percentage of ODA to GNP in each of the years 2007 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43740/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Last week for budget 2018, the Government announced a total allocation of €707 million to Official Development Assistance (ODA). This represents an increase of some €26 million on the current year, and is the third consecutive year the Government has increased budget allocations to Ireland's Aid programme.

Just over €500 million of the total ODA allocation for 2018 will be managed by my Department through Vote 27 International Cooperation, publically known as Irish Aid. This represents a welcome increase of over €13 million on the 2017 allocation to Irish Aid. The further €207 million is comprised of funding made by other Government Departments to multilateral organisations, such as that provided by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to the World Food Programme, as well as Ireland's share of the EU Development Cooperation budget.

This significant investment in Ireland's development aid programme is a clear demonstration of the Government's commitment to making sustainable and manageable increases to the aid budget as resources allow.

On current projections for Gross Domestic Product (GNP), the 2017 ODA/GNP percentage

will be approximately 0.3%. Using the GNP forecast for next year, it is expected that the 2018 ODA/GNP percentage should again be 0.3% - in effect maintaining the target at the expected 2017 outturn level.

I am committed to a clear roadmap towards the achievement of the UN target of an ODA contribution of 0.7% of GNP. Working with Minister Coveney and colleagues across Government, I would anticipate proposals in this regard in the first half of next year.

Our priority is to now use those additional resources to meet our commitment in the fight against poverty and hunger, continue to bring real and sustainable improvements some of the world's poorest communities and increase our response to the unprecedented level of humanitarian needs worldwide.

A summary of the percentage of GNP spent on ODA for the years 2007 through to 2017 are set out as follows:

ODA as a Percentage of GNP 2007 - 2017 (Figures in € Millions)

	Year	ODA as a % of Revised GNP
Estimate	2017	0.30%
Outturn	2016	0.33%
	2015	0.32%
	2014	0.38%
	2013	0.43%
	2012	0.47%
	2011	0.50%
	2010	0.51%
	2009	0.54%
	2008	0.59%
	2007	0.53%

Undocumented Irish in the USA

211. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress to date in addressing the undocumented Irish in the United States of America; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43964/17]

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 thousands of Irish citizens.

Ireland's diplomatic representatives in the U.S continue to take every opportunity to raise the immigration issue with the US authorities and with their contacts on Capitol Hill.

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.

We do not, however, underestimate the size of the challenge.

This policy area has been a deeply divisive issue within the US political system for decades, with pronounced disagreement, even within the same political parties, on the best way to deal with a problem which directly affects over 11 million people.

The Government has always tried to work with both parties in a bipartisan way to address our longstanding concerns and this continues to be our approach.

During my visit to New York for the UN General Assembly in September, I met with representatives of the four Irish Immigration Centers in the region and a representative of the US-wide Coalition of Irish Immigration Centres. It gave me the opportunity 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.

In addition, I met with a senior State Department official and used 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.

I was able to further emphasise the Government's commitment to this issue when I travelled to Washington DC from 3 to 5 October and met with senior members of President Trump's administration and with members of Congress.

I was pleased that Deputy John Deasy, the Government's Special Envoy to the US Congress on the Undocumented, who was appointed by the Taoiseach to that position last June, was able to accompany me to those meetings. His appointment was another important statement of our intent and seriousness on this issue.

In addition, 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.

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.

I can assure the Deputy of the Government's continued commitment to pursuing these matters on behalf of our affected citizens in the U.S.

Direct Provision Data

212. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons who have died while in the direct provision system since 1 January 2007; the ages of the persons who died; the reasons for the deaths; the number that were the result of suicide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43845/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The position in relation to this matter is as set out in my response to a similar question in recent weeks.

The wellbeing of residents in direct provision is an absolute priority for the Reception and Integration Agency, which is the agency of my Department tasked with overseeing the provision of full board accommodation and certain ancillary services to persons in the protection process. Since the direct provision system was established in 2000 some 60,000 persons have benefited from these services, and some deaths of residents have occurred in this period.

While overseeing the delivery of different services, my Department has no direct role in the provision of health or health related services to protection applicants. Such services are provided through the Department of Health by the Health Service Executive (HSE) via hospital, primary care and the GP services. Protection applicants receive these health services on exactly the same basis as Irish or EU citizens who have medical cards. All health matters are private between a patient and his or her medical advisor and records in relation to any illness, including mental illness are, properly, not available to Departmental staff. Similarly, when persons in the protection process die, their deaths are treated by medical personnel and/or the coroner in exactly the same way as any other person who passes away within the jurisdiction of the State. The same procedures apply to protection applicants as to other persons who are not protection applicants.

While my Department collates some statistics on deaths of persons in the protection process, this is usually by way of a general knowledge of the cause of death, such as by way of information arising from the specified medical needs of the resident concerned. In most cases, the deaths would have occurred outside of State-provided accommodation e.g. in hospitals or hospices. While the HSE do issue death certificates, official records in relation to deaths are maintained by the Register of Births Marriages and Deaths, which is now under the aegis the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection. The Department has no access to death certificates, nor would it be appropriate under data protection safeguards for it to seek such access, and it is therefore not possible to provide the information sought by the Deputy.

Legislative Programme

213. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when he plans to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which was signed by the Government on 30 March 2007; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43375/17]

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.

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.

Criminal Assets Bureau

214. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the most recent valuation of all land seized by the Criminal Assets Bureau; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43378/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I refer the Deputy to my reply to PQs 43337/17 and 43338/17 of Thursday 12 October, 2017.

As indicated in my reply, section 21 of the Criminal Assets Bureau Act 1996 requires the Bureau, through the Garda Commissioner, to provide a report of its activities each year to the Minister for Justice and Equality who is then required to lay copies of the report before each House of the Oireachtas.

Details in relation to the number of assets classified as property/land and their valuation as outlined to the court at the time when Orders were being made under section 2 of the Proceeds of Crime Acts (as amended) are set out in the Annual Reports of the Bureau, copies of which are available in the Oireachtas library and on the website of An Garda Síochána and my own Department.

Departmental Bodies Data

215. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the State bodies or boards that fall under the remit of his Department; and the number of members of each State body or board who are not qualified within the field in which the board or body has oversight. [43419/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, my Department has responsibility for a large number of bodies, both statutory and non-statutory. These bodies range in scale from large scale national services such as An Garda Síochána, the Courts Service, the Irish Prison Service and the Property Registration Authority; sectoral regulators such as the Private Security Authority, the Property Services Regulatory Authority and the Legal Services Regulatory Authority; oversight bodies such as the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, Garda Síochána Inspectorate, Policing Authority and Inspector of Prisons; to statutory Boards exercising appellate type functions and which have no full time dedicated staff (e.g. Censorship of Publications Boards, Private Security Appeal Board, the Legal Terms Advisory Committee).

The governance structure of these bodies varies and not all have boards. Board positions are now generally advertised through the state boards process, which clearly specifies the statutory criteria, which may include a requirement for professional qualifications or specify particular experience. While these criteria may be directly relevant to the nature of body's work, they may also refer to financial, governance or stakeholder interests; for example, the Courts Service Board includes a person representative of court users.

Further information on these bodies and the nature of the relationship between them and my Department can be found in the Department's Corporate Governance Framework on our website (www.justice.ie); details of the members of State Boards can be found on the State Boards website (www.stateboards.ie).

Residency Permits

216. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43434/17]

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

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

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

Garda Stations

217. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to reopen Garda stations which were closed in County Clare in view of the fact that his Department found the resources to reopen the Garda station in Stepside; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43463/17]

219. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to reopen garda stations which were closed in County Limerick in view of the fact that his Department found the resources to reopen the Garda station in Stepside; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43469/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 217 and 219 together.

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, as Minister, I have no responsibility for these matters.

As the Deputy will be aware, during 2011 and 2012, An Garda Síochána completed a comprehensive review of its District and station network with the objective of identifying opportunities to introduce strategic reforms to enhance service delivery, increase efficiency and streamline practices within the organisation. The review concluded that a revised District and station network commensurate with the organisation's resource base would best meet public demand. In the case of certain stations, many of which were only open part-time and manned by a single Garda, the review determined that resources could be better deployed and more effectively used on the front line if those stations no longer had to be staffed and maintained.

As a result, the Garda District and Station Rationalisation Programme was implemented, which resulted in the closure of some 139 Garda stations, including 9 in Clare and 8 in Limerick, and the amalgamation of 28 Garda Districts into 14 enlarged Districts. In reaching these conclusions, I understand that Garda management reviewed all aspects of the Garda Síochána policing model, including the deployment of personnel, the utilisation of modern technologies and the overall operation of Garda stations.

As a result of the Programme, communities have benefited from increased Garda visibility and increased patrolling hours which has enabled An Garda Síochána to deliver an improved policing service to the public.

The Programme for a Partnership Government commits to 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.

I recently published the second interim report of the Garda Commissioner, which recommended that the former Stepside station in Co. Dublin be reopened on a pilot basis and indicated that, subject to further analysis, the Commissioner is likely to recommend in the final report the inclusion of the former stations at Leighlinbridge, Co. Carlow and Donard, Co. Wicklow in the pilot scheme. If a second station is to be reopened in Dublin, the Report indicates that the Commissioner is likely, subject to further analysis, to recommend that the former station at Rush, Co. Dublin be included in the pilot scheme.

I understand that work is ongoing in An Garda Síochána to finalise the report and that it is expected to be received shortly, at which point it will be brought to Government.

The Deputy will be aware that the Government's focus is on increasing Garda numbers and ensuring that Gardaí are appropriately resourced to protect and serve the community. In this context, among the range of justice measures announced in the Budget, the Government committed to recruiting 800 additional Gardaí and a further 500 civilians in 2018 together with continued investment of some €6 million in new Garda vehicles in 2018 to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern and fit for purpose fleet.

I am informed that in comparison to similar jurisdictions, Ireland is served very well by its ratio of police stations to population:

- Ireland has 564 Garda stations (for approximately 4.7 million people);
- Northern Ireland (2012) had 86 police stations for a population of 1.5 million people;
- Scotland has 340 stations for 5.2 million people.

Garda Recruitment

218. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of trainees for An Garda Síochána who are in the Garda College, Templemore; and the number of those anticipated to be allocated to the Limerick division. [43468/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime. To make this a reality for all, the Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

Taking account of projected retirements, reaching a strength of 15,000 by 2021 will require some 2,400 new Garda members to be recruited on a phased basis over the next three years in addition to the 2,000 that will have been recruited by the end of this year since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014. I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that there are currently 431 trainee Gardaí undertaking training in the Garda College.

The workforce plan is progressing apace. I am informed by the Commissioner, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014 that close to 1,400 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, of whom 39 were allocated to the Limerick Division. I am also informed that another 200 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest later this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016. In addition to this, a further 800 Garda trainees are expected to attest in 2018.

I am pleased to say that Budget 2018 will support the continuation of this high level of investment in the Garda workforce and ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track.

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

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

Question No. 219 answered with Question No. 217.

Garda Welfare

220. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the mental health supports in place for serving gardaí; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43474/17]

221. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the cases of five serving gardaí who committed suicide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43475/17]

222. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if more supports will be rolled out to serving gardaí; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43476/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 220, 221 and 222 together.

It is the role of the Coroner Service to investigate unnatural or sudden deaths including deaths that may have resulted from suicide, in order to establish the 'who, when, where and how' of an unexplained death. Accordingly, it would not be appropriate for me to be specific about the number of members of An Garda Síochána who lost their lives through suicide as some cases of unnatural or sudden deaths of members of An Garda Síochána may still be before the Coroner Service.

That said, clearly the family, friends and colleagues of any Garda members who have lost their lives through suicide are deserving of our deepest sympathies.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that following any such tragic loss An Garda Síochána puts in place a comprehensive welfare response to assist and support members who may be affected. The welfare response is delivered by the Garda Employee Assistance Service, Occupational Health Department, Human Resource Management and Local Management. It includes various interventions including Critical Incident Stress Debriefing, Peer Support, Bereavement and Self Care Education.

I am advised by the Commissioner that the Garda Employee Assistance Service is avail-

able to members of An Garda Síochána and supports them in managing and resolving personal and work-related difficulties. In addition, there is an independent confidential help line and counselling service available to all staff within An Garda Síochána. This service provides all employees with immediate support from accredited counsellors, over the telephone and then, if needed, up to eight face-to-face counselling sessions. These sessions take place in a location within one hour of the employee's home or place of work. Counselling is provided on a wide range of work and personal issues including critical incidents, trauma, financial issues, relationships, bereavement, stress, conflict, and health. The service is available on a twenty-four hour basis, every day.

I also understand that there is a Peer Supporter Programme operating in each Garda District and that following a traumatic incident a peer supporter who has received appropriate training in helping colleagues cope with the effect of a traumatic incident in the workplace will contact the member(s) who were involved in the incident and offer support.

The Deputy will be aware that Connecting for Life is Ireland's national strategy to reduce suicide 2015-2020. Connecting for Life sets out a vision of an Ireland where fewer lives are lost through suicide, and where communities and individuals are empowered to improve their mental health and wellbeing.

A Cross-Sectoral Group comprising high-level representatives from Government Departments and key State agencies including An Garda Síochána has been established to support the implementation of Connecting for Life.

Residency Permits

223. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a person (details supplied) will be informed on the outcome of their appeal which has been delayed for many months. [43501/17]

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 mentioned by the Deputy was refused permission to remain in the State on the basis of their marriage to an Irish National.

I understand that the person concerned has appealed the decision and that the appeal is currently being considered. A decision in relation to the appeal will issue shortly.

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

224. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of bomb detection dogs currently active and at the disposal of An Garda Síochána in Dublin Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43522/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appre-

ciate that the provision and allocation of resources for An Garda Síochána is a matter for the Garda Commissioner and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter.

The policing and security of Dublin Airport is the responsibility of An Garda Síochána along with other law enforcement agency stakeholders each of whom has a specific role to play in ensuring airport security.

I understand from the Garda authorities that a comprehensive Policing Plan is in place for Dublin Airport and has been developed with all security agencies operating at the Airport to deliver a co-ordinated response to security.

I further understand that there are currently 23 dogs attached to the Garda Dog Unit, comprising general purpose (search), drugs and explosive detection dogs. For security and operational reasons, An Garda Síochána has advised that information in relation to the number of specific detection dogs and their locations is not made public.

Protected Disclosures

225. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to the fact that, seven months on from an examination of a protected disclosure by a person (details supplied), nothing has been done to address the issues raised in the disclosure; the reason the person is not being properly paid; the reason they have been removed from the payroll again in error; if the second disclosure submitted by the person will be examined; if he will address their inappropriate treatment by management; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43592/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The case to which the Deputy refers was dealt with in accordance with the protected disclosures policy in place, including an external review, on foot of which various actions were taken. The case is currently the subject of proceedings which were instituted by the individual in question before the Workplace Relations Commission, as is their right, and it would not therefore be appropriate to comment further on the protected disclosure at this time.

I am informed by the Irish Prison Service that the individual in question is being paid in line with the applicable civil service regulations.

Additional matters raised in recent correspondence from the individual in question are currently being reviewed by the Irish Prison Service Protected Disclosures recipient.

Prison Service Staff

226. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the action taken by his Department to ensure that prison officers who are threatened by prisoners while on duty are given appropriate supports and security; the number of proven cases of threats to officers that were witnessed; the action taken in each case; if officers are paid in full should they take leave arising from such incidents; if such payments are made for long periods of time, if there is a maximum period; if officers injured at work arising from assaults by prisoners are paid in full for the length of time of their recovery; the number of officers out of work due to prisoner assaults; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43593/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Director General of the Irish Prison Service that upon receipt of notification that a member of staff

has been threatened whether on duty or off duty, Operations Directorate immediately action the Irish Prison Service Staff Security Protocol. Both local Gardaí and Garda HQ are advised of the details of the threat. An investigation and threat assessment are conducted by Gardaí, and where appropriate, the Irish Prison Service will support the installation of security measures at the officer's home. Since 1 January 2016, of the threats reported to Operations Directorate, five have been verified by an Garda Síochána and the appropriate measures taken.

In the event an employee avails of certified sick leave and the absence is deemed to be occupational injury or disease related (under the terms of Department of Finance circulars 1/82 and 6/97), the employee is entitled to 183 days full pay in a rolling 1 year period after which they will be placed on half pay and to 365 days in a rolling 4 year period after which they will be removed from the payroll. Once an employee is removed from the payroll after reaching the maximum paid sick leave allowed, they may be entitled to Temporary Rehabilitation Remuneration.

However, in the event that the employee's absence on certified sick leave is not deemed as injury on duty related, paid sick leave entitlements for ordinary illness apply (DPER Circular 12/2015). The employee is entitled to 92 days full pay in a rolling 1 year period after which they will be placed on half pay and to 183 days in a rolling 4 year period after which they will be removed from the payroll. Again, they may be entitled to Temporary Rehabilitation Remuneration following removal from the payroll.

In 2015, the Director General of Irish Prison Service obtained sanction from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for a Serious Physical Assault Scheme for Prison Officers which allows that, in cases where an officer has suffered a serious physical assault, full pay may be sanctioned up to a maximum of twelve months.

I am further advised by the Director General of the Irish Prison Service that there are currently 19 employees absent on sick leave as a result of an occupational injury, 6 of which are as a result of an alleged assault by a prisoner.

The first strategic action of the Irish Prison Service Strategic Plan 2016 - 2018 is Staff Support. The Irish Prison Service has a number of support services which employees have access to; namely Staff Support Officers at local prison level, the National Officers of the Employee Assistance Programme and Inspire Workplaces, which has been contracted by the Irish Prison Service to provide a free counselling service for all IPS staff. This service is completely confidential and is designed to assist employees in resolving personal or work-related concerns. It is a 24/7 Freephone helpline, with access to up to 6 follow-up counselling sessions for support covering a wide range of issues.

Furthermore, the Irish Prison Service is introducing the Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) model of support for staff. CISM addresses stress management for prison personnel who may encounter stressful situations not normally experienced by the general public. CISM provides guidance to staff on how to manage and control stress and reduce or eliminate uncontrolled stress. CISM comprises of a continuum of care and targets the response of individuals and groups of individuals to traumatic events rather than the incident itself. It aims to minimise the emotional impact of critical incidents on IPS staff, increases the resistance and resilience of IPS staff to harmful stress and prevent the harmful effects on staff of these incidents by working with and supporting IPS staff at the time of Critical Incidents.

Drugs in Prisons

227. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of drugs security officer roles filled in prisons; the prisons in which they are working; and the prisons which do not have drugs security officers. [43650/17]

228. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the implementation of the keeping drugs out of prison policy published in 2006, which mandates that all prisons maintain accurate statistics on drug seizures by location of seizure, method of introduction to the prison, type of drug, amount and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43651/17]

229. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the difficulties posed by a failure to keep records of the types and quantities of drugs seized in prisons for the development of prison drug treatment services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43652/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 227, 228 and 229 together.

I am advised by my officials that the Irish Prison Service policy ‘Keeping Drugs out of Prison’ was introduced in 2006 to address many aspects of drug use in prison, including measures to reduce the use of illegal drugs in the prison setting.

In 2008, the Operational Support Group (OSG) was established which received resources and investment in order to implement the key objectives of Keeping Drugs out of Prison. A key role of the OSG is to support governors in implementing Government policy, including the prevention of the smuggling of contraband (including drugs) into prisons, the detection and prevention of illegal activity within the prison Estate and intelligence-gathering.

Many of the roles envisaged for Drugs Security Officers as outlined in the Keeping Drugs out of Prisons Policy, were, therefore undertaken by the creation of the OSG and OSG Assistant Chief Officer grades (of whom there are 2 in each closed prison) effectively perform the role envisaged for drugs security officers.

In relation to the maintenance of accurate statistics on drug seizures, I am advised that the OSG maintain records in relation to drug seizures and that these statistics are regularly reported to IPS HQ. However there are limitations on the details recorded, in view of the fact that the IPS does not have the laboratory facilities required to establish the exact chemical composition of all drugs.

Departmental Funding

230. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount of funding per annum charities and government agencies (details supplied) received for 2016 or the nearest available year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43658/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The National Women’s Council of Ireland received €400,000 from the Department of Justice and Equality.

The Rape Crisis Network Ireland received €85,000 from the Department of Justice and Equality.

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission is accountable directly to the Oireachtas

and is funded through Vote 25. The final appropriation accounts for 2016 are currently awaited, but the estimate provision was €6.306m and the outturn was €6.208m.

Fire Safety

231. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the preparations currently taking place to ensure a safe Halloween for communities around Ireland; if he will report on the implementation of the laws regarding the sale and use of fireworks and the retrieval of fireworks, bangers and bonfire materials; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43899/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy may be aware, fireworks, because they are explosives, are regulated under national and EU legislation and can only be imported into the country under licence and stored and sold in accordance with explosives law. Fireworks are categorised into four categories, depending on their hazard and whether they require specialist knowledge to use them. The least hazardous is Category F1 (party poppers and sparklers) and the most hazardous is Category F4.

It is Government policy therefore, in the interests of safety and security, to restrict the availability of the more hazardous fireworks (i.e. categories F2, F3 and F4) to the general public. These can only be imported, by way of licence, for use in organised displays and conducted by professional/competent operators.

In this regard, the Criminal Justice Act 2006 introduced new offences and penalties relating to illegal possession, sale and misuse of fireworks:

- It is an offence for any person to possess a firework with intent to sell or supply, without a licence,
- It is an offence to throw an ignited firework at any person or property, and
- It is an offence to light unlicensed fireworks in a public place.

Part 6 of the Criminal Justice Act 2006 amended the Explosives Act 1875 to give Gardaí the power to make arrests in relation to the possession of unlicensed fireworks. The penalties for these offences are very severe. Having unlicensed fireworks in your possession with intent to sell or supply can result in a fine of up to €10,000 and up to five years imprisonment. Igniting the fireworks or throwing an ignited firework at a person or property is also liable to the same severe penalties.

I believe that these offences and penalties are serving both as a deterrent and as an aid to An Garda Síochána. Leading up to Halloween every year, special efforts are made by An Garda Síochána to combat the illegal importation, sale and use of fireworks. I have asked the Garda Commissioner for a report on the measures being taken this year and I will write to the Deputy when it becomes available.

My Department also puts in place an annual public information campaign in the days leading up to Halloween in the national newspapers to remind the public of the dangers of fireworks and the significant penalties for their illegal use.

Along with the placement of the notice in the national print media (this year from the 22 October to 31 October 2017 inclusive), general information and the notice itself will also be on the homepage of the Department's website, and the notice is being communicated using the

Department's social media accounts.

The Department also liaises with the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) who facilitate the Department by uploading a link to the notice to its website. Scoilnet (a Department of Education and Skill's portal for Irish education) is facilitating the Department by uploading the notice to its website and placing it in their newsletter. The Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) has arranged to circulate a Link from my Departments website to all Local Authorities in the State to help publicise the dangers and illegality of fireworks with the general public. My Department has also asked Dublin City Council and An Garda Síochána to use its social media outlets channels to highlight and promote our Department's message as it has done in previous years.

Bench Warrants

232. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of bench warrants outstanding in the Garda R and J districts as of 6 October 2017; the number of warrants that have been outstanding for more than nine months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43907/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): My Department has sought a report from the Garda authorities in relation to the matter in question and I will respond directly to the Deputy when the report is to hand.

Garda Equipment

233. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has provided funding for the installation of a state-of-the-art satellite navigation system in each Garda vehicle; if all Garda vehicles are now linked to this system providing key information for Garda management; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43908/17]

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 and, as Minister, I have no role in relation to the matter.

I am, however, informed by the Garda authorities that vehicles attached to the Garda fleet are installed with secure TETRA technology, which is the current state of the art technology for public safety communications across Europe and which enables geographical positioning using satellite technology. The technology ensures that Garda vehicles and personnel are contactable throughout the State and links to the Automatic Vehicle and Personnel Location System (AV-PLS) which displays the location of vehicles and personnel in Garda control rooms.

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 almost €30 million in the period 2013 to 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.

Garda Station Refurbishment

234. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to refurbish Clontarf Garda station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43909/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has the responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. As Minister, I have no direct role in relation to these matters.

I have, however, been informed by the Garda authorities that a number of refurbishments have been carried out to Clontarf Garda station in recent times. For example, the re-wiring and general refurbishment of the station, including refurbishment of the public office, the provision of modern incident and conference room facilities together with an upgrade of the canteen facilities was completed during 2010. In addition, the cells in the station were upgraded in 2012 under the Cell Refurbishment Programme.

I understand that the OPW has recently completed works to the car park at the station which will increase the number of spaces for Garda vehicles as well as dealing with a number of health and safety issues.

Garda Deployment

235. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of new Garda recruits who have been allocated to the Garda R district in each of the years 2015 and 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43910/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime. To make this a reality for all, the Government has in place a plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

This plan is progressing apace. This year, funding was 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 was been provided for the recruitment of 300 Garda Reserves.

I am pleased to say that Budget 2018 will support the continuation of this high level of investment in the three strands of the Garda workforce and ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track.

The area referred to by the Deputy is covered by the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) North Division. I am informed by the Commissioner that the Garda strength of the DMR North Division, on 31 August 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 666. There are also 46 Garda Reserves and 38 civilians attached to the Division. When appropriate,

the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

I am further informed by the Commissioner, since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, that almost 1,400 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 105 of whom have been assigned to the DMR North Division, as outlined in the following table. I am also informed that another 200 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources needed to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division, including the DMR North Division in the coming years.

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

The number of newly attested Gardaí allocated to the DMR North Division since the Garda College reopened in 2014 is as set out in the table.

Division	2015	2016	2017
DMR North	19	34	52

Commencement of Legislation

236. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when it is expected that section 9 of the Criminal Justice Act 2011 will be commenced; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43937/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The commencement of the provisions in section 9 of the Criminal Justice Act 2011 awaits the finalisation of regulations required to facilitate their implementation. These regulations are currently being progressed in conjunction with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel in the Attorney General's Office.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

237. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the State has not ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; when the convention will be ratified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43946/17]

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.

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.

Commissioner of Valuation

238. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to the most recent global valuations carried out under the Valuation Acts, the national valuation in respect of each of the utilities covered by this process; the position regarding the process on the way in which rates are set on these national utilities in which it is collected; the way in which it is divided amongst each of the local authorities; the formula that is used; if it is based on population or based on the most recent census or other methods; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43960/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Commissioner of

Valuation is independent in the exercise of his statutory functions under the Valuation Acts, 2001 to 2015. The carrying out of a valuation of a public utility undertaking (i.e. a global valuation) is the Commissioner's sole prerogative and I as Minister for Justice and Equality do not have any function in this regard.

Global valuations of public utilities are carried out on a five-yearly cycle as provided for in the Valuation Acts, 2001 to 2015. The initial round of global valuations was carried out in the period 2004 to 2006 following the passage of the Valuation Act 2001. The next round of global valuations was carried out in the period 2009 to 2011 and the latest round commenced in 2014 and was completed in 2016. I am advised that the global valuation process is also deployed in other common law jurisdictions and is an efficient mechanism for valuing public utilities with a national or regional network on a five year cycle.

In the most recent round of global valuations, the Commissioner carried out a valuation of two public utilities in 2014 and seven public utilities in 2015. The utilities, with their respective valuations, were: the Electricity Supply Board - valuation €389,000,000; and Eirgrid - valuation €774,000; in 2014. In 2015 the seven utilities were: Gas Networks Ireland - valuation €110,570,000; Iarnród Éireann - valuation €8,930,000; Eircom - valuation €84,700,000; Three Ireland - valuation €27,750,000; Meteor Mobile Communications Ltd - valuation €20,720,000; Vodafone Ireland - valuation €41,000,000; and BT Communications (Ireland) Ltd - valuation €7,240,000. Two further communications utilities were valued in 2016 - RTE Transmission Network Ltd - valuation €4,200,000 and Virgin Media Ltd - valuation €28,000,000. The changes reflected in these 2014, 2015 and 2016 valuations arise from changes in the rateable value of each of the respective undertakings since last valued in 2009, 2010 and 2011 respectively.

The global valuation process relates solely to the network occupied by the particular public utility and used by it for its principal object or purpose, such as the supply of electricity or gas or the provision of telecommunications or public transport. These global valuations cover all of the pipeline networks and systems of lines, cables, masts, posts, pylons, wires and other ancillary constructions which pertain to the use or development of the utility and which are necessary to get its products to the consumer. It should be noted that the global valuation does not include the valuation of other properties such as retail units or offices or industrial space occupied by the public utility but not used by it for its principal object or purpose. These other properties occupied by the utility are valued outside of the global valuation framework and in the same manner as properties occupied by other businesses.

The basis of valuation of all rateable property throughout the State is 'Net Annual Value' (NAV), as defined in Section 48 of the Valuation Act. This applies to both public utility undertakings valued on a global basis and conventional rateable properties such as shops, offices and industrial facilities operated by other businesses.

The most recent global valuations issued by the Commissioner were in respect of the communications utilities RTE Transmission Network Ltd and Virgin Media Ltd on 5 September 2016. Sections 53 and 56 of the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015 require the NAV determined by a global valuation to be apportioned amongst rating authorities and the apportioned valuation to be reduced to rateable valuation ('RV') in the rating areas yet to be revalued. This is a standard practice once a global valuation has been finalised.

The Valuation Act 2001 provides for the application of a Discount Factor, which is a technical mechanism to be considered when the global valuation is being apportioned between the various rating authority areas in which the network's property is located. Its application, if and where appropriate, is to take account of global valuations made and placed on an existing valuation list of a particular rating authority area before a revaluation has been carried out in that area

(under Section 19 of the 2001 Act). This is a transitional provision provided for in the legislation to ensure equity and uniformity across all valuation lists. It is not arbitrary and is intended to reflect the relativity of the values on an existing valuation list to the NAV of the utility.

Statutory Instruments were prescribed to apportion the valuations and to reduce them to make relative as required by Section 53 of the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015. As part of the process, and as required by Section 53(8), consultation was carried out with the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government. Following detailed consideration of an appropriate reducing factor, a factor of 0.002343 was adopted for the global valuations published in both 2015 and 2016. The reducing factor only applied in non-revalued areas and thus excludes the City and County Council areas of Dublin, Limerick and Waterford which have been the subject of revaluation. I am advised that it was considered that, outside of the Dublin area, there had been no movement in the commercial rental market between the global valuation dates of 2014 and 2015. Therefore the reducing factor of 0.002343 was retained for the global valuations of RTE Transmission Network Ltd and Virgin Media Ltd, both of which had a valuation date of 2015 and which were published on 5 September 2016.

The global valuation is apportioned pursuant to Section 53(6)(a) of the 2001 Act, between each of the rating authorities in whose areas property comprised in the global valuation is situated. The apportionment is in the proportion, expressed as a percentage of the total population taken under the last published census of population.

As regards the collection of the rates, under Irish law there is a distinct separation of function between the valuation of rateable property and the setting and collection of commercial rates. The amount of rates payable by a particular ratepayer in any calendar year is a product of the valuation set by the Commissioner of Valuation, multiplied by the Annual Rate on Valuation ('ARV') decided annually by the elected members of each local authority. Whereas the setting of valuations is the responsibility of the Commissioner, the annual setting of the ARV is a reserved function of the elected members of each local authority and the Commissioner has no function in that regard.

Graffiti Policy

239. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to restart the community graffiti reduction programme previously funded by his Department in order that householders can get assistance in removing graffiti. [43962/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Community Graffiti Reduction Programme was introduced in February 2008 and was sponsored by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Pobal managed the programme on behalf of these Departments. The programme ceased operation in 2009, and there are currently no plans to reintroduce the scheme.

Under the Litter Pollution Act, 1997, the primary responsibility for management and enforcement responses to litter pollution, including the defacement of structures by writing or other marks, lies with local authorities. The Act provides significant powers to local authorities to deal with these issues, including on-the-spot fines. It is a matter for each local authority to decide on the most appropriate public awareness, enforcement and clean-up actions to deal with graffiti, taking account of local circumstances and competing priorities.

I am advised by An Garda Síochána they also task local Community Policing Units with

compiling information which might identify individuals associated with various graffiti incidents. In some instances graffiti is criminal damage and is dealt with by An Garda Síochána under the provisions of the Criminal Damage Act 1991. A person found guilty under the Act may be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding €1,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or both.

The Probation Service, which falls under the remit of my Department, operates two graffiti removal projects as part of its Community Service Scheme. One project is based in Dublin and one in Cork. The Probation Service does not have a dedicated graffiti project budget. Such projects are included within the overall community service budget.

Commemorative Events

240. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans in the lead up to the 95th anniversary of the execution of Liam Mellows by the Free State in Mountjoy Gaol to issue a State apology to the families of the at least 77 persons executed in this period (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43452/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Government will continue to mark the significant historical events that took place on the road to the foundation of the State and will be advised and supported in its plans by the guidance of the Expert Advisory Group on Centenary Commemorations and in consultation with the Oireachtas All-Party Consultation Commemorative Committee, which I am in the process of reconvening.

I am committed to ensuring that the State's approach to remembering this period, and all of those who lost their lives during it, will be based on the respectful, sensitive, inclusive and authentic approach that has become the hallmark of the Decade of Centenaries commemorative programme.

Creative Ireland Programme

241. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the expenditure of the Creative Ireland programme to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43369/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): An enabling budget of €5m was allocated to implement the Creative Ireland Programme in 2017. This includes an ambitious plan to deliver ten high level initiatives by the end of 2017. Further details on the content of the Programme are available on <http://creative.ireland.ie>.

To date, a sum of €3.4m has been spent implementing the Creative Ireland Programme. This includes €1m allocated to the local authorities to support their Culture and Creativity Plans for 2017, and €1.1m towards planning and rolling out Cruinniú na Cásca on Easter Monday. An additional sum of €0.3m has been spent on developing two websites to inform the public at home and abroad: <http://creative.ireland.ie> and www.Ireland.ie and associated digital content and social media platforms to support these websites. These have been promoted by an extensive public campaign to engage citizens in the Programme which to date has cost €0.25m.

The Creative Ireland Programme is not a funding body and as such does not administer any grant or funding schemes. However, the Programme is taking the opportunity in this, its initial year, to engage and collaborate with several key cultural partners at various important national

events and festivals in order to promote the objectives and underlying values of this major new Programme, and encourage deeper understanding and appreciation of the role of the creative arts. To date a sum of €0.25m has been spent on this element of the Programme.

The remaining sum of €0.5m has been expended on administrative and operational costs associated with the Creative Ireland Programme Project Office.

Arts Funding

242. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the State's contribution to cultural services per capita in comparison to the rest of the EU 28; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43371/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Funding allocations made available to my Department are published each year in the Revised Estimates Volume with the outturn published in the Annual Appropriation Account.

The 2017 allocation to Arts, Culture and Film Division of my Department is €158.261m. The 2018 allocation to the Arts, Culture and Film Division is €167.301, an increase of 5.7% on the previous year.

Most of this is allocated to the agencies under the aegis of the Department, including the Arts Council and Film Board, however, this does not represent all expenditure on the Arts in Ireland.

Expenditure on the arts in Ireland comes from multiple sources, both public and private, including from other Government Departments.

I understand that the CSO does not produce national statistics that capture the totality of this expenditure on a per capita basis. Recently however, EUROSTAT published figures for expenditure on cultural services across the EU in 2015 (as a subset of a broader category of expenditure on Recreation, Culture and Religion). This indicated that expenditure on Cultural Services in all 28 member states was EU €66,133 million in 2015 while the equivalent figure for Ireland was €580 million. This in turn would suggest a per capital spend in Ireland on this sub-category of €125 per head of population as compared to an EU 28 average of €130 per head of population.

However, it should be noted that my Department is engaging with the CSO in relation to the returns which Ireland makes regarding cultural expenditure to EUROSTAT to ensure that they are robust and comparable with data from other Member States covered by EUROSTAT. In this regard, the Department will be carrying further research in the coming period on expenditure on culture in Ireland.

Details of the EUROSTAT tables are at this *link*: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/8/85/Total_general_government_expenditure_on_recreation%2C_culture_and_religion%2C_2015_%28%25_of_GDP_%25_of_total_expenditure%29.png.

EU Programmes

243. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to fund application assistance for Creative Europe applications for large scale projects in view of the underperformance of Irish applications in funding rounds to date; and if she will

make a statement on the matter. [43372/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I wish to advise the Deputy that in 2017 there was in fact a positive outcome for Irish applicants from the Co-operation Projects Strand of the Creative Europe Culture Sub-Programme.

In 2017 a total of 36 applications were made involving Irish organisations (2 as coordinators and 34 as partners) with a success rate in 2017 of 24%, well above the EU average of 16% and the UK average of 20%.

The overall direct grant allocation to Irish projects for the 2017 round of funding was just under €624k, which brings the total amount allocated to Ireland since the start of the Creative Europe Culture Sub-Programme to just under €2.1 million.

The Culture and Media Creative Desks, supported by the Arts Council, Irish Film Board, as well as through liaison with my Department, provide expertise and assistance for all applications being submitted to the Creative Europe Programme to optimise their potential for success.

In order to support and assist Irish arts organisations who intend to apply under the Creative Europe Culture Sub-Programme, the Arts Council offers the Creative Europe (Culture Sub-Programme) Travel Award. This award is open to arts organisations developing proposals under the Creative Europe Culture Sub-Programme, and is intended to cover some of the costs associated with face-to-face meetings and to build connections with partner organisations in Europe.

In 2016, the Arts Council introduced a **Co-funding Award** which is open to Irish arts organisations which have been successful under the co-operation projects strand (both large and small scale) of the Creative Europe Culture Sub-Programme. This award assists Irish arts organisations in raising the required match funding for the Irish artistic costs associated with their project.

Full support is offered through these means to incentivise and facilitate as wide a participation as possible in the Creative Europe Programme 2014-2020 by Irish arts organisations and to build capacity within the sector in the longer term to develop suitable projects for European funding.

Disability Services Provision

244. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the steps she is taking to increase the access for disabled persons to the arts; the amount of funding she has allocated to these programmes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43393/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Under the Arts Act 2003, primary responsibility for the promotion and support of the arts, including arts participation, throughout the country is devolved to the Arts Council.

The strategic context for the Arts Council's support of arts participation and all other art forms and areas of arts practice is set out in Making Great Art Work: Arts Council Strategy (2016 –2025). This strategy describes how the Council will lead the development of the arts in Ireland over the next decade. This strategy has five priority areas: the artist; public engagement; investment strategy; spatial and demographic planning; and developing capacity.

The Arts Council funds a number of key organisations and agencies that have a central role

in supporting these strands of work, including Create; Arts & Disability Ireland; Age & Opportunity and Waterford Healing Arts Trust.

I understand the Arts Council's arts and disability policy is due to be reviewed and updated in the context of the council's new ten year strategy.

National Cultural Institutions also respond through their programmes to develop wider access including for people with disabilities. In this context it should be noted that my Department has also been engaged with the National Council for the Blind of Ireland to consider the needs of the visually impaired. My Department will continue to work with the Council of National Cultural Institutions to encourage the development of access to all audiences.

My Department is also represented on the National Disability Inclusion Strategy Steering Group, and under the National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017 – 2020, is committed to ensuring that accessibility for all is supported through;

- the application of universal design principles in the development of buildings and facilities, and

- integrating disability inclusion into the design and operation of funding programmes and schemes.

My Department provides significant capital support for cultural facilities nationwide. So far this year I have announced details of €10.078 million in capital funding to a total of 122 arts organisations under the Arts and Culture Capital Scheme 2016-2018. This scheme is the most significant investment in arts and cultural centres in a decade and will target investment at a range of different facilities, including works undertaken to improve disability access to venues.

Details of the projects supported are available on my Department's website at www.chg.gov.ie.

Arts and Culture Capital Scheme Funding

245. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her attention has been drawn to the lack of spaces for younger and non-professional artists to participate in musical, artistic or other creative activities; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43394/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am aware of the issue regarding the provision of affordable studio space, particularly as a result of the changing property market. My Department has had discussions with the Arts Council, the Office of Public Works and some local authorities to consider possible short-term and longer-term approaches to the issue, both in relation to specific issues in Dublin and to wider national approaches.

This year I announced details of over €10 million in capital funding to a total of 122 arts organisations around the country under the Arts and Culture Capital Scheme 2016-2018. This allocation included over €900,000 in funding for projects involving artist's studios and creative spaces.

In addition, as part of the Government's initiative on the North East Inner City, I awarded a grant of €35,000 last year to Fire Station Artists' Studios, Buckingham Street, to assist in providing additional studio space in conjunction with Dublin City Council.

The list of successful projects under the Arts and Culture Capital Scheme 2016-2018 is available on my Department's website at the following link: <https://www.chg.gov.ie/arts/creative-arts/grants-and-funding/>.

Arts Plan

246. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if there are regular meetings of regional arts offices with each other. [43395/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I assume the Deputy is referring to Local Authority Arts Offices which are primarily an operational matter for the local authorities. However, I understand that there are opportunities for Arts Officers to engage with each other, for example, under the auspices of the Association of Local Authority Arts Officers.

The Arts Council, which is funded by my Department, provides support to local authorities directly for arts programming. The Arts Council also engages with local Arts Officers and local authorities in this role. In this regard, in March 2015 the Arts Council and the County and City Management Association announced a new ten year agreement A Framework for Collaboration which gives a formal structure to the relationship between the Arts Council and local authorities for the first time.

Finally, Arts Officers are part of the local authority Culture Teams in local authorities across the country, and my Department, through the Creative Ireland Programme office, engages collectively with the co-ordinators of local authority Culture teams on a regular basis.

Arts Funding

247. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if there is designated funding made available to Youthreach services for the provision of arts subjects. [43396/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Youthreach programme is a matter for my colleague the Minister for Education and Skills and any funding under the Programme would be provided under the Department of Education and Skills.

Departmental Bodies Data

248. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the State bodies or boards that fall under the remit of her Department; and the number of members of each State body or board who are not qualified within the field in which the board or body has oversight. [43412/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The following State bodies or boards fall under my remit: the Arts Council; the Chester Beatty Library; the Crawford Art Gallery; the Heritage Council; the Irish Film Board; the Irish Museum of Modern Art; the National Archives Advisory Council; the National Concert Hall; the National Gallery of Ireland; the National Library of Ireland; the National Museum of Ireland; the Irish Manuscripts Commission; Foras na Gaeilge; Údarás na Gaeltachta; and the Ulster Scots

Agency.

In line with Government policy, all Ministerial appointments to State boards under my remit are made following an open application process via the Public Appointments Service (PAS).

The dedicated website, *www.stateboards.ie*, is the channel through which the PAS advertises vacancies on State Boards. It is also the means through which accomplished, experienced and qualified people, including people who might not previously have been identified as available for appointment, can then apply to be considered for particular vacancies.

This process aims to achieve a balance of different skills and qualifications needed for each board, whether these be in the Cultural, Heritage or Gaeltacht areas, or in more general areas of expertise such as corporate governance, finance, risk management, philanthropy, etc. All of the Ministerial appointments to boards under my remit have met the qualification criteria set by PAS. In addition, many appointments to the boards under my remit are made in ways other than via direct appointment by me as Minister: ex officio appointments; appointments arising from the recommendations of local authorities or other bodies; appointments by existing trustees in the case of the Chester Beatty Library; and appointments by the North/South Ministerial Council in the case of North/South bodies.

National Parks and Wildlife Service

249. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the National Parks and Wildlife Service has previously taken action to scare gulls off treated water reservoirs for Dublin city; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43532/17]

250. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the NPWS has previously taken action to scare and-or remove gulls off rooftops at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43533/17]

251. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the NPWS has previously taken action to scare and-or remove gulls off a location (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43534/17]

265. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the NPWS has previously acted to scare gulls away from treated water reservoirs in Dublin city, Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda and at a location (details supplied). [43560/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 249 to 251, inclusive, and 265 together.

My Department has previously issued licenses under section 42 of the Wildlife Acts to scare (birds) or remove eggs or nests of various gull species in respect of the locations referred to by the Deputies. The NPWS does not undertake such work as that is a matter for the relevant applicant or competent authority. The responsibility of my Department is in relation to the granting of licenses for such actions.

National Parks and Wildlife Service

252. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the NPWS issued a licence authorising a scientific study of species (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43535/17]

253. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the person or organisation that applied for the licence for a scientific study of species (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43536/17]

254. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the NPWS received a copy of the report of a study of species (details supplied) from the team that conducted it; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43538/17]

255. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the action in line with her Department's role and function, the NPWS has taken or plans to take in relation to a study of species (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43540/17]

262. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the NPWS issued a licence authorising a scientific study of species (details supplied) to investigate the presence of antimicrobial resistance in the species certain types of which, if present, would have potentially serious implications for public health; the organisation which applied for the licence for the study; the action the NPWS has taken or plans to take in relation to the study; and the timeframe for such action. [43554/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 252 to 255, inclusive, and 262 together.

My Department has issued no such licence.

The Minister for Health has addressed the matter of the study in response to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 271 and 272 today.

National Parks and Wildlife Service

256. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the NPWS issued a licence authorising a scientific study (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43541/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department issued no such licence.

EU Directives

257. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of her Department's decision to exclude public health from the reasons provided in the derogation schedule 2 for 2017/18 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43543/17]

258. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of her Department's decision to restrict and zone the derogation schedule 2 to apply only in Balbriggan and its districts (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43544/17]

264. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the reason for her Department's decision to exclude public health from the reasons given in the derogation schedule 2 for 2017/2018. [43556/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 257, 258 and 264 together.

The EU Birds Directive allows Member States to make derogations from its protective measures in respect of certain wild bird species in certain circumstances – for example, where they are causing damage to crops, livestock and fauna or represent a threat to public health or safety or to air safety. The Declarations to implement these derogations are renewed annually and an annual review of the Declarations is undertaken prior to their expiry.

This year's review took into account the issue of seagulls in the North Dublin area especially in Balbriggan which has been the subject of correspondence to my Department from some community groups and other residents which proposed the inclusion of seagull species in the Declaration.

Following consideration of the matter, the recent Declaration, which is effective from 1 May 2017 to 30 April 2018, includes methods to control seagull species in the Balbriggan area for public safety reasons. There is no requirement to specify further reasons. The control method can involve the removal of eggs and nests only; the culling of seagulls is not permitted.

These changes are being introduced on a one year pilot basis and will be subject to review as part of a wider comprehensive review of the operation of the derogations next year. This comprehensive review will take account of all relevant factors, including perceived threats, distribution and population data available in respect of all the bird species in the declaration.

EU Directives

259. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her or the NPWS's attention have been drawn to the scientific study by a person (details supplied) dealing with AMR in wildlife and the policy implications both for public health and for wildlife management functions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43545/17]

260. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her or the NPWS's attention have been drawn to the scientific study published by the national veterinary authorities of Serbia dealing with AMR specifically in gulls and the serious public health implications; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43546/17]

261. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on whether scientific studies (details supplied) have implications for the NPWS's determinations in respect of the public health criterion in the derogation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43547/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 259 to 261, inclusive, together.

The studies referred to in the Questions have been brought to the attention of my Department and will also be brought to the attention of the experts to be appointed to carry out a review of the derogation referred to.

Question No. 262 answered with Question No. 252.

National Parks and Wildlife Service

263. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the NPWS issued a licence authorising a scientific study in Galway of the Brent geese species to investigate the presence of antimicrobial resistance in the species certain types of which if present would have potentially serious implications for public health; the organisation which applied for the licence for the study; the action the NPWS has taken or plans to take in relation to the study; and the timeframe for such action. [43555/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department issued no such licence.

Question No. 264 answered with Question No. 257.

Question No. 265 answered with Question No. 249.

Official Languages Act

266. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if there are methods whereby a community can change the name of their areas on maps; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43849/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): It is the role of the Chief Placenames Officer to advise me, as Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht regarding the Irish language version of placenames countrywide. Section 32 of the Official Languages Act 2003 provides that the Minister issue Placenames Orders placing these Irish language placenames on a statutory footing.

My Department has no role in relation to the amendment of maps produced by Ordnance Survey Ireland or any other body.

Planning Guidelines

267. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on statements made by Kerry County Council in the planning zoning document, Landscape Character Assessment of Kerry, that the majority of landscapes in north County Kerry are not important for scenery, tourism or recreation (details supplied). [43987/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Local Authorities are responsible for their own local Landscape Character Assessments. Landscape Character Assessment is a tool for identifying the features that give a locality its particular 'sense of place' and is used to categorise the landscape into areas of similar character. It is not a value assessment on any particular landscape.

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 to be implemented in two phases. The key action in Phase one, as set out in the Implementation Programme, will be 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.

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 character assessment process, within City and County Development Plans, at local government level.

Planning Guidelines

268. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to call an inquiry into the landscape character assessment of Kerry and the related renewable energy strategy for County Kerry and planning zoning (details supplied). [43988/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I do not have a role in relation to the establishment of any such enquiry. Local authorities are responsible for their own local Landscape Character Assessments. 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). In considering individual planning applications, local authorities also have a role in relation to the assessment on sites designated as Special Areas of Protection under the EU Birds Directive. I am also a statutory consultee in relation to specific planning applications.

Planning Issues

269. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of unbuilt wind turbines that have live planning permission or permission granted but not yet used throughout the country by county. [43989/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I have no function in this matter.

Local Authority Staff Recruitment

270. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if funding will be provided to create a Wexford County Council heritage officer position; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44015/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The County Heritage Officers Programme is a partnership between the Heritage Council, which is funded by my Department, and Local Government.

County Heritage Officers are employed directly by local authorities with financial, technical and professional support from the Heritage Council. The decision as to whether to appoint a Heritage Officer is a matter for each local authority. The Heritage Council is available to work with any local authority to advise and support them in this regard.

Infectious Diseases

271. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a copy of the full case made to his Department by the applicants for the licence for the scientific study of a species (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43537/17]

272. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health if health risks from faecal contamination from gulls was a stated concern in a study of a species (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43539/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 271 and 272 together.

The HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) has previously considered the evidence pertaining to gulls and potential health risks. A number of scientific studies have looked at the specific issue of human disease and gulls (from the early 1980s on; the most recent in 2005). While there is some evidence that wild birds (including gulls) may transmit salmonella to animal feed and drinking water and by this mechanism potentially lead to human infection, the evidence for this in each instance was considered weak. Studies that have looked at the likelihood of direct spread of salmonella from gulls to humans conclude that gulls as carriers of Salmonella constitute little health hazard to human health concluding that there is only a low risk of transmitting Salmonella from either gulls or feed factories they may contaminate to humans or domestic animals.

The HPSC gathers information on the causes of outbreaks of infectious disease and for individual cases of infectious disease it collects information on individual risk factors (i.e. those factors known to contribute to disease development but not necessarily proven in the particular case being examined). A look back for the last ten years by the HPSC, indicates that out of 25,000 reported cases of campylobacter and 3,500 cases of salmonella there have been three cases of salmonellosis that could be explained by bird contact (two of these were pet birds) and two cases of campylobacter, one of which mentioned proximity to gulls. This means an association but does not mean that birds caused the disease.

In recognition of the serious and increasing threat of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and the requirement for a 'whole of Government' approach to health issues, the Department of Health's Chief Medical Officer (CMO) and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) established a high level National Interdepartmental AMR Consultative Committee to address this issue. The Committee meets Ireland's requirements to have an intersectoral co-ordination mechanism for addressing AMR at the European level.

As well as work on enhancing surveillance between the health and agriculture sectors, the Committee's work in 2017 has overseen the development of Ireland's first National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance 2017-2020. This ambitious 3-year Plan has been jointly prepared by the two Departments in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders and covers the use of antimicrobial medicines in animal health and agriculture, as well as human health. Following the World Health Organisation's Global Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (2015), which requires all countries to have a national action plan in place by mid-2017, Ireland's draft Plan lists Strategic Interventions and Activities, responsible bodies and priority rankings of timelines for implementation.

Ireland's National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance 2017-2020 (iNAP) will be launched on Wednesday 25th October next. The Plan will be launched by Minister Simon Harris TD and Minister Michael Creed TD, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine as the development of iNAP has been a cross-Departmental initiative, requiring a cross sectoral and whole of Government approach to addressing the world wide threat of AMR.

This ambitious 3-year Plan covers the use of antimicrobial medicines in animal health and agriculture, as well as human health - taking a 'One Health' approach to tackling AMR, encompassing all sectors. The Plan lists Strategic Interventions and Activities, responsible bodies and priority ranking of timelines for implementation. An implementation plan will be developed separately which will address means of tackling AMR as appropriate to each sector.

Dental Services Provision

273. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if his Department has an input into the provision of dental services for primary school-going children (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43643/17]

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.

Hospitals Policy

274. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the sale price and date of sale of St. Senan's hospital and all associated lands in Enniscorthy; the alternative arrangements for remaining clients and staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43374/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the management of the healthcare property estate is a service matter, your question has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Appointments Status

275. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in Dublin 7 will receive an appointment for occupational therapy; and the reason for the delay [43382/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

276. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43390/17]

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

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed

national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

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

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

277. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health if he will direct the HSE to review its decision and the processes used in arriving at the decision not to approve for reimbursement of the drug Translarna for treatment of Duchenne muscular dystrophy in view of the fact that many other countries have given such approval; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43401/17]

281. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health his plans to make the drug Translarna available through the HSE for persons in view of the fact that this medication is available through the public health system in neighbouring jurisdictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43456/17]

404. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health his plans to intervene in the unprecedented High Court appeal brought by a company (details supplied) against the HSE decision not to reimburse for Translarna for the treatment of Duchenne muscular dystrophy in two persons in view of the fact that this legal process will be more costly than providing the drug and may result in these two persons missing their opportunity for treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44063/17]

405. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health if his Department or the HSE will work towards an interim arrangement to treat the persons with Duchenne muscular dystrophy who require Translarna here should a lengthy legal process unfold; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44064/17]

406. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health the reason the HSE's decision not to reimburse for Translarna was at odds with 22 other European countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44065/17]

407. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health if he is satisfied that appropriate negotiations have taken place between the HSE and a company (details supplied) ahead of the company resorting to legal action; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44066/17]

408. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health his views on the fact that a High Court action is the only route of appeal available to a company (details supplied) and the lack of an independent review in the appeals process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44067/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 277, 281 and 404 to 408, inclusive, together.

The Health Service Executive has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

The HSE informed my Department of its decision not to reimburse Ataluren (Translarna) in

July 2017. The HSE, in deciding not to reimburse Translarna, cited uncertainty around clinical evidence but advised the applicant that it would be open to reviewing any additional clinical evidence if any should become available. The HSE informed the applicant of this decision, in keeping with the requirements of the 2013 Act. The applicant has appealed the HSE's decision to the High Court, which is part of the statutory process under Section 27 of the 2013 Act.

As proceedings have now issued against the HSE, this is now subject to the Courts process.

It would be inappropriate for me to comment on a matter currently before the Courts.

Hospital Services

278. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health his plans for the development and funding of the national paediatric rheumatology services in Crumlin, which has a waiting list of 825 children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43406/17]

374. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the competing priorities for funding (details supplied); the position regarding children with arthritis, who are waiting for two years on the list of priorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43885/17]

375. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address a shortfall (details supplied) in care for children with JIA in the annual Estimates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43886/17]

376. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the reason a submission by OL-CHC requesting funding for the third rheumatology consultant has not been granted for the past three years (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43887/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 278 and 374 to 376, inclusive, together.

In relation to the query raised, as this is a service issue I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly regarding the actions being taken to address waiting times for children who require rheumatology services across the three children's hospitals.

Departmental Bodies Data

279. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Health the State bodies or boards that fall under the remit of his Department; and the number of members of each State body or board who are not qualified within the field in which the board or body has oversight. [43417/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): All members appointed to State Boards should have the appropriate competencies to fulfil their role as members on State Boards. The membership of the boards and State Bodies under my remit is normally specified in the establishing legislation for that board or State Body. Members of boards or bodies for which I have nominating rights, in line with Government Decision S180/20/10/1617 of 2014 and Guidelines set out by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, are appointed following application to the Public Appointments Service. This process results in only those candidates who are deemed to have the relevant competencies and skills to be shortlisted for my consideration for appointment as board members.

I have interpreted the Deputy's question as relating to the regulators of health professions, where best practice would be that there should be a majority of members who are not registered in the profession which is being regulated by that Board. There are 6 Regulatory Bodies and the number of members in each who are registered professionals in the profession which is being regulated is set out in the following table.

Professional Regulatory Board	Total number of members	Board Members who are registrants of the Regulatory Body	Other
Dental Council	19	12	7
Health and Social Care Professionals Council (CORU)	29	14	15
Medical Council	25	12	13
Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland	23	11	12
Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland Council	21	10	11
Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council	17	6	11

The Health and Social Care Professionals Council also provides the administrative support for 10 Registration Boards. The total number of members for each of these Registration Boards is thirteen, six of whom are professional members and seven non-professional members.

The Department is currently developing new legislation to replace the Dentists Act 1985 and the membership of the Dental Council will be addressed in this context.

Assisted Human Reproduction Services Provision

280. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if 2019 is the earliest date that public funding can be provided for assisted human reproduction; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that some persons are of the view that this may be too late for them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43449/17]

286. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if the roll-out of IVF treatment will be widened from persons with medical cards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43478/17]

354. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Health when the subsidised funding for IVF will be available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43741/17]

401. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health when funding will be made available to couples for IVF treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43969/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 280, 286, 354 and 401 together.

On Tuesday 3 October 2017 the Government approved the drafting of a Bill on assisted human reproduction (AHR) and associated areas of research. Officials in my Department are

engaging with the Office of the Attorney General in relation to the process of drafting this Bill.

In relation to the issue of public funding and AHR treatment, I intend to revert to Government by the end of this year with proposals for a potential model of public funding for AHR treatment for the Government's consideration and decision.

As the Deputy may be aware, the Health Research Board's (HRB) evidence review of international public funding models for AHR was published earlier this year. This evidence review examines 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.

An analysis of the HRB evidence review will feed into the development of policy options for a potential public funding model for AHR treatment by my officials. This policy options paper will be presented to me by the end of this year and I will then submit these proposals to Government. It is important to note that any funding model that may ultimately be introduced would need to operate within the broader regulatory framework set out in the AHR Bill.

Question No. 281 answered with Question No. 277.

Services for People with Disabilities

282. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application for home support by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43457/17]

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 a service matter, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Waiting Lists Data

283. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times for cardiac rehabilitation in University Hospital Limerick and the Mid-Western Regional Hospital, Ennis; the strategies in place to resolve these delays; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43471/17]

284. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the delays for cardiac rehabilitation in University Hospital Limerick and the Mid-Western Regional Hospital, Ennis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43472/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 283 and 284 together.

As the issues raised are operational matters, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Budget 2018

285. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the amount of funding that has been allocated in budget 2018 for mental health services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43477/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Budget 2018 made allowance for an additional €59 million for Mental Health Services for 2018. €35 million is made up of the €20 million continuing cost in 2018 of developments initiated in 2017, combined with a further €15 million for further new developments. €24 million will fund pay-related costs. In addition, the Minister for Health has committed to a further €55 million to be made available for mental health services in 2019.

This increase will result in a Mental Health Budget of €912.1 million, an increase of €200 million, or 28%, since 2012. In addition, the Minister for Health has committed to a further €55 million to be made available for mental health services in 2019.

Question No. 286 answered with Question No. 280.

Respite Care Services Provision

287. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if a request for a public health nurse to call to a person (details supplied) in County Cork will be facilitated. [43479/17]

288. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if respite care will be made available to a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [43480/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 287 and 288 together.

As these are service matters I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Medicinal Products Availability

289. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if there have been issues for persons travelling abroad in accessing vaccines for hepatitis A and typhoid, in particular the ViATIM and Hepatyrix vaccines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43483/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has up to date travel advices on its website for people travelling abroad. For specific travel advice, including information on vaccinations you should contact your G.P. or travel clinic as the HSE does not offer private vaccinations for travellers. The Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA), which is responsible for the regulation of medicinal products in Ireland, is aware of supply issues in relation to Hepatitis A vaccines. These shortages are not specific to the Irish market and there are ongoing discussions at European level in relation to management of the shortages which have affected supply in a number of countries.

Based on the current information available to the HPRA, the current supply situation for the two vaccines is as follows:

- Viatim (Typhoid Vaccine, Hepatitis A Vaccine, Purified Inactivated, for Adults) - Sanofi

Pasteur Europe. The company responsible for marketing the product (Sanofi) has advised that while the vaccine was recently out of stock in Ireland, it received a shipment of 10,000 units which was made available for sale in Ireland on the 10th October 2017. The company has also confirmed that at present no further shortages or supply constraints for Viatim are expected for the remainder of 2017 or in 2018.

- Hepatyrix (Hepatitis A (inactivated) and Typhoid Polysaccharide vaccine (adsorbed) - GlaxoSmithKline (Ireland) Ltd. This product has not been available in Ireland since approximately September 2016. It is also out of stock in other markets. The reason for the shortage is a combination of the company (GlaxoSmithKline) having insufficient manufacturing capacity to meet the increased global demand for Hepatitis A vaccine and also some manufacturing difficulties with the typhoid component of the vaccine. At this time, the company is unable to confirm when supply will be restored.

Counselling Services Provision

290. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health if funding of community counselling services as provided for by an organisation (details supplied) will be provided; the reason funding was refused by the lottery funding system; his plans to preserve this service into the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43492/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Disability Services Provision

291. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will review a matter (details supplied) and address the concerns of parents; his plans to enhance facilities or relocate these services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43493/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

292. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied). [43494/17]

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.

Disabilities Assessments

293. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the analysis which has been made by HSE north lee, south lee and north Cork of the numbers of those awaiting assessment under the assessment of need provisions of the Disability Act 2005; the assessment officer staffing capacity processes; and if outstanding assessments of need will be expedited before the end of the fourth quarter of 2017. [43495/17]

294. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the proposals he has considered from an organisation (details supplied) as service providers for disability services in its attempts to resolve the matter of growing waiting lists for assessment of need requests under the Disability Act 2005. [43496/17]

295. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health if he has been advised by an organisation (details supplied) as to its incapacity to carry out assessments of need and of legal and statutory obligations on the part of the HSE in respect of delays in carrying out such assessments under the Disability Act 2005; and if so, the measures which will be taken to alleviate this issue. [43497/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 293 to 295, inclusive, together.

The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question's relate to a service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

General Practitioner Services Provision

296. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health if general practitioner cover will be provided for Fermoy Community Hospital, County Cork. [43498/17]

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.

Patient Data

297. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons both in-patient and outpatient, that present with Parkinson's disease here. [43499/17]

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

Emergency Departments Staff

298. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the reason the accident and emergency department of Wexford General Hospital does not have a psychiatric nurse employed there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43504/17]

299. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health his plans to allocate a psychiatric nursing post to the accident and emergency department of Wexford General Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43505/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 298 and 299 together.

As these are service matters, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Emergency Departments Staff

300. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the accident and emergency departments of hospitals that do not have a psychiatric nurse employed; the reason these departments do not have psychiatric nurse employed there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43506/17]

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.

Patient Data

301. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of patient on patient attacks recorded within HSE facilities in each of the years 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43507/17]

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

Mental Health Services Data

302. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of mental health

staff attacked by patients at HSE facilities in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43508/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Mental Health Services Staff

303. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of mental health nurses employed at the end of each of the years 2010 to 2016, and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43509/17]

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.

Primary Medical Certificates Provision

304. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when a primary medical certificate will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43510/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question relates to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Disability Services Provision

305. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43512/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

306. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of a knee operation for a person (details supplied); if this appointment will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43521/17]

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

307. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for a procedure at University Hospital Waterford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43527/17]

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

308. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if a hospital appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [43531/17]

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.

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

309. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of speech and

language therapy for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43552/17]

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's relate 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.

Respite Care Services Provision

310. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if full cover is in place for personnel employed at a respite facility (details supplied) in County Donegal who are availing of maternity leave or parental leave entitlements; the gaps in staff cover at the facility as a result; the number of hours each day for which cover is not in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43553/17]

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 Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists

311. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health the number of children in County Cork on a waiting list for occupational therapy; the number awaiting occupational therapy services for up to 12, 24 and 36 months and over, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43564/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

312. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied)

will receive an appointment for an operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43565/17]

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

313. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a cataract operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43566/17]

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.

I acknowledge that waiting times are often unacceptably long and I am conscious of the burden that this places on patients and their families. Reducing waiting times for the longest waiting patients is one of this Government's key priorities. Consequently, Budget 2018 announced a total allocation of €55m for the National Treatment Purchasing Fund (NTPF) for 2018, which more than doubles their 2017 total allocation of €20m.

In order to reduce the numbers of long-waiting patients, I asked the HSE, in conjunction with the NTPF, to develop Waiting List Action Plans for 2017 in the areas of Inpatient/Daycase, Scoliosis and Outpatient Services. These plans have been published and their implementation is ongoing. The Inpatient/Daycase and Outpatient Plans focus on reducing the number of patients waiting 15 months or more for inpatient and daycase treatment or for an outpatient appointment by the end of October. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

314. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled; if the HSE will supply sufficient funding in this case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43578/17]

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

315. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the supports available to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43580/17]

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.

Non-Acute and Community Agencies Funding

316. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the assistance which can be provided to an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43585/17]

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

Health Services Funding

317. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be made available to a centre (details supplied) in County Kilkenny to cover the costs of extending the services being offered and the cost of dealing with referrals from Tusla and the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43588/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Medicinal Products Availability

318. **Deputy John McGuinness** 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. [43591/17]

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.

Stroke Care

319. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the measures he will take to address the concerns of a person (details supplied) about funding for basic standards of stroke care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43596/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The National Clinical Programme for Stroke (NCPS) has been in place since early 2010. The vision of the programme is to design standardised models of integrated care pathways for the delivery of clinical care to ensure sustained quality clinical operational management. Overall, the NCPS aims to improve quality, access and cost-effectiveness of stroke services in Ireland.

Some of the achievements of this programme in improving access to services to date include:

National 24/7 access to safe stroke thrombolysis

Emergency thrombolysis is provided to patients in all parts of the country, via improved hospital and ambulance protocols, health professional training and the appointment of new stroke physicians. The national stroke thrombolysis rate has increased from 1% in 2006 to a rate of 12% (2016).

The NCPS has developed a number of initiatives including a telemedicine programme to allow delivery of expert thrombolysis therapy in smaller level three hospitals. It has been involved in the training of over 250 doctors nationally to deliver thrombolysis therapy and has participated in a training programme for Stroke in the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland.

Improved access to stroke unit care

Access to stroke unit care has been shown to improve stroke patient outcomes through reduced mortality rates, reduced dependency and shorter lengths of stay in hospital by patients. Since the commencement of the NCPS, nine new stroke units have been opened, bringing the total number of stroke units in acute hospitals to twenty-two. Two further stroke units are currently in development with a third at planning stages.

This is a major improvement from the first national stroke care audit report in 2006 which reported one stroke unit in the country. However stroke units are typically too small and the recent national Audit showed that only half of stroke patients admitted spent any time in a stroke unit.

Admission to a stroke unit is a National Key Performance Indicator. In 2016, 65.6% of Stroke patients were admitted to a Stroke Unit.

The HSE are considering the further development of Stroke Units in the context of the 2018 Service Plan.

Early Discharge of Stroke Patients

It has been recognised internationally that Early Supported Discharge of stroke patients from hospital improves outcomes, reduces need for long term care and increases acute hospital capacity by freeing up beds. It is estimated the 10-25% of patients could benefit from an ESD service.

The programme has helped establish 3 small but effective ESD teams in Dublin and Galway. In 2016, 137 patients were discharged to ESD services representing 15.6% of total stroke discharges. It is estimated that there was an average reduction in length of stay of 10.4 days per ESD patient.

Funding for increasing capacity in the three operational sites has been secured for 2017 with further funding secured to support the establishment of two further teams in University Hospital Limerick and Cork University Hospital. Recruitment of these ESD staff is ongoing. University Hospital Limerick is due to commence its ESD Service in the latter part of 2017.

As part of the phased introduction of ESD, the NSP has recommended a further 9 teams, to be established over a three year period and is under consideration in the context of the 2018 National Service Plan.

Emergency Endovascular Therapy – Thrombectomy

Thrombectomy is an emergency endovascular procedure that permits patients with severe strokes caused by clots occluding the major vessels of the brain and neck to have these clots removed using specialist devices. HIQA has completed a Health Technology Assessment which found that this intervention is value for money.

Provision of emergency endovascular thrombectomy is available in Beaumont Hospital and Cork University Hospital.

To date, the number of patients undergoing this procedure has risen annually, on average almost 50% increase each year: 2015 = one hundred and twenty two cases, 2016 = one hundred and seventy two cases, 2017 – end of August = one hundred and fifty four cases. These patients have been referred from 20 different hospitals around the country.

The expansion of thrombectomy is under consideration in the context of NSP 2018.

The Stroke Manifesto published by the Irish Heart Foundation has been noted and it will be one of the factors that will contribute to the ongoing policy development in this area.

Nursing Staff Provision

320. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if all nursing posts that have been filled in the Roscommon mental health service within the past two years were advertised; if so, the locations where these positions were advertised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43599/17]

324. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the number of nursing staff employed in the Roscommon mental health service in September 2017; the number employed in September 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43603/17]

327. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the number of nursing staff in the Roscommon mental health services employed by an employer other than the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43606/17]

329. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact there are persons in the community who need the supports of the Roscommon mental health services; the number of nursing staff available to those persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43608/17]

332. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the number of clerical staff in the Roscommon mental health services to offer clerical assistance to nursing staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43611/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take

Questions Nos. 320, 324, 327, 329 and 332 together.

As these are service matters I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Nursing Staff Data

321. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if all nursing posts that have been filled in the Castlerea mental health service within the past two years were advertised; if so, the locations where these positions were advertised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43600/17]

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.

Nursing Staff Provision

322. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if all nursing posts that have been filled in the Ballaghaderreen mental health services within the past two years were advertised; if so, the locations where these positions were advertised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43601/17]

325. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the number of nursing staff employed in the Ballaghaderreen mental health service in September 2017; the number employed in September 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43604/17]

326. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the number of nursing staff in the Ballaghaderreen mental health services employed by an employer other than the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43605/17]

330. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there are persons in the community who need the supports of the Ballaghaderreen mental health services; the number of nursing staff available to those persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43609/17]

333. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the number of clerical staff in the Ballaghaderreen mental health services to offer clerical assistance to nursing staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43612/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 322, 325, 326, 330 and 333 together.

As these are service matters I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Nursing Staff Provision

323. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the number of nursing staff employed in the Castlerea mental health services in September 2017; the number employed in September 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43602/17]

328. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the number of nursing staff in the Castlerea mental health services employed by an employer other than the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43607/17]

331. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact there are persons in the community who need the supports of the Castlerea mental health services; the number of nursing staff available to those persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43610/17]

334. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the number of clerical staff in the Castlerea mental health services to offer clerical assistance to nursing staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43613/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 323, 328, 331 and 334 together.

As these are service issues, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Question No. 324 answered with Question No. 320.

Questions Nos. 325 and 326 answered with Question No. 322.

Question No. 327 answered with Question No. 320.

Question No. 328 answered with Question No. 323.

Question No. 329 answered with Question No. 320.

Question No. 330 answered with Question No. 322.

Question No. 331 answered with Question No. 323.

Question No. 332 answered with Question No. 320.

Question No. 333 answered with Question No. 322.

Question No. 334 answered with Question No. 323.

Graduate Medicine Programme Fees

335. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health if there are funds within his Department to assist a person (details supplied) who is attending college overseas in order to become a doctor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43615/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The funding of undergraduate medical education is a matter for the Department of Education and Skills.

The number of places currently funded is considered sufficient to supply the needs of the Irish health care system. With regard to the issues of recruitment and retention of graduating doctors, my Department is monitoring the implementation of the MacCraith Report recommendations, which deal with these topics.

The position is that there are no funds available, within my Department, to assist individuals

acquire undergraduate medical degrees outside this State.

Hospital Waiting Lists

336. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) cannot be added to a hip operation waiting list while they lose weight; if there is a specific weight criterion for this procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43616/17]

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.

Disabilities Assessments

337. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Health the average waiting times to begin and complete, respectively, an assessment of need under the Disability Act 2005 after the date of application in each county in each of the years 2007 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and the number of whole-time equivalent assessment officers employed in each of the years since 2007 in each county, in tabular form. [43644/17]

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's relate to a service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

338. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will receive treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43654/17]

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

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

The scheduling of appointments is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider the patient's condition warrants and 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.

Departmental Funding

339. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health the amount of funding per annum charities and Government agencies (details supplied) received for 2016 or the nearest available year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43659/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department administered a National Lottery Discretionary Fund up to and including 2016 from which once-off grants were paid to community and voluntary organisations providing a range of health related services. The 2016 National Lottery Fund provided a grant of €24,075 to the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCi) to fund the World Congress on Women's Mental Health in March 2017. The other organisations named by the Deputy were not awarded National Lottery funding by my Department in 2016.

I have asked the Health Service Executive to reply directly to the Deputy regarding funding paid to the organisations named during 2016.

Neuro-Rehabilitation Policy

340. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Minister for Health the status of the draft HSE rehabilitation medicine model of care; when it will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43686/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred out to the Health Service Executive for a direct reply to the Deputy.

Home Care Packages Provision

341. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of a home care package for a person (details supplied); the detail of this home care package; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43687/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): As the Deputy's question relates to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

Home Care Packages Data

342. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of home care packages and transitional care beds that will be provided by the €37 million funding announced in budget 2018. [43696/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Budget 2018 has provided additional resources for Services for Older People and we are in a position to strengthen supports, in particular to facilitate speedier discharge from acute hospitals this winter. Discussions are ongoing between the Department and the HSE in relation to the level and timing of home care packages and transitional care approvals that can be provided following last week's announcement.

Mental Health Services Funding

343. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the expenditure on mental health in 2017; the equivalent figures on a like-for-like basis in terms of services provided in each of the years from 2011 to 2016 taking into consideration reclassifications of expenditure between those dates. [43698/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The HSE Mental Health Services Division expects to spend its full allocation of €853 million in 2017.

Funding provided for Mental Health Services for each year for the period 2011 to 2016 are as follows:

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Allocation	712.0	711.0	737.0	766.0	791.8	826.6
Spend			709.0	735.8	785.4	825.0

Mental Health Services Funding

344. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the increased funding announced for mental health in line with the programme for Government commitment in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and the amount of that funding for each calendar year that was actually drawn down or spent on mental health services, in tabular form. [43699/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Funding provided for Mental Health Services for each year for the period 2012 to 2017 are as follows:

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Allocation	711.0	737.0	766.0	791.8	826.6	853.1
PFG & Pay Agreement	35.0	35.0	20.0	35.0	35.0	15 PFG & 9.6 Pay
Net Increase		26.0	29.0	25.8	34.8	26.5
Spend		709.0	735.8	785.4	825.0	853.1*

**projected*

The HSE Mental Health Services Division expects to spend its full allocation of €853 million in 2017.

Mental Health Services Funding

345. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Health the amount the €35 million in additional funding for mental health announced in budget 2017 that was spent in the 2017 period; the amount that was included in the expenditure figure for 2017; the amount that was carried over into the budget 2018 figures announced recently; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43700/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The HSE Mental Health Services Division expect to spend its full allocation of €853 million in 2017. Budget 2017 made allowance for an additional €35 million for services to be initiated in 2017 and continued in 2018. Recognising the time-frame required to initiate new developments, €15 million was provided as part of the overall 2017 Budget. This was in part due to the time lag of new staff taking up posts and the completion of preparations for the introduction and enhancement of key priorities as specified in the HSE's 2017 Service Plan.

Budget 2018 announced €35 million to further develop mental health services in 2018 and the Minister for Health has also committed an additional €55 million in funding for 2019. The €35 million increase is made up of the €20 million continuing cost in 2018 of developments initiated in 2017, combined with a further €15 million for further new developments.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

346. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the nature of discussions between his Department or agencies under his remit with an organisation (details supplied) regarding the nursing home support scheme particularly regarding the NTPF. [43705/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Department of Health has met regularly with various stakeholders, including Nursing Homes Ireland. Meetings with NHI have discussed a wide range of issues including the review of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme, funding of Long Term Care, residential care standards, recruitment and workforce planning. NHI was also represented on previous Working Groups chaired by the Department which considered the Care and Welfare Regulations and Towards a Restraint Free Environment in Nursing Homes. In November 2016 NHI presented to the Interdepartmental Working Group established to oversee certain recommendations contained in the review of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme.

I have had three meetings with the NHI, the most recent of which took place in September 2017. A number of different issues were discussed, including nursing home charges, cost pressures, the recruitment and retention of health care assistants in the nursing home care sector and workforce planning and the implementation of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme review.

The NHSS is a system of financial support for those assessed as needing long-term nursing home care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their means while the State pays the balance of the cost. Under law each private and voluntary nursing home must negotiate and agree a price for long-term residential care services with the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) should they wish to be an approved nursing home for the purposes of the Scheme.

The process of setting prices with individual private nursing homes is commonly referred to as the NTPF pricing mechanism. The National Treatment Purchase Fund has statutory independence in the performance of its function, and negotiates with each nursing home on an

individual basis.

A Steering Committee was established to oversee and manage the pricing review. The Steering Committee is chaired by the NTPF and includes representatives from the Department of Health, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) and the NTPF. External consultants Deloitte and Prospectus were engaged by the NTPF in June 2016 to assist in its review of the pricing mechanism. Numerous stakeholders were engaged in this process, including NHI. Work in this area is ongoing and well advanced.

Hospital Staff Recruitment

347. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 760 of 21 March 2017, the progress made on the recruitment of an additional 4.5 whole-time equivalent sonographers at CUMH. [43707/17]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

348. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the alarm among disabled persons and their families and carers in County Donegal, caused by the closure of the swimming pool at a location (details supplied); if the swimming pool will be reopened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43713/17]

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's relate to a service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Mental Health Services Funding

349. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the projected expenditure on mental health in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43720/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The HSE Mental Health Services expect to spend their full allocation of €853 million in 2017. New developments have been initiated and will continue to be enhanced, along with existing services, in the coming years in line with the Programme for Government and recommendations from A Vision for Change.

Between 2012 and 2017 €140 million additional funding has been provided to the Mental Health Budget, with an addition of €59.1 million announced in Budget 2018, bringing increased investment by the Government to over €200 million, or 28%, since 2012. In addition,

the Minister for Health has committed to a further €55 million to be made available for mental health services in 2019.

Mental Health Services Funding

350. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the amount of the additional €15 million for mental health in 2017 which will be spent in 2017; the specific initiatives it has funded; the number of additional positions it has provided in the mental health division; the use to which unspent funds will be diverted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43721/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The HSE Mental Health Services Division expects to spend its full allocation of €853 million in 2017. This includes the €15 million allocated to new developments, which have been initiated and will continue to be enhanced, along with existing services, in the coming years in line with the Programme for Government and recommendations from A Vision for Change.

Among the initiatives funded by the €15 million are Forensic Community In-Reach Teams, additional Nurse Undergraduate places, and the enhancement of both 7-day-a-week and Eating Disorder services.

The number of additional posts provided for in 2017 is 325.

Budget 2018 made allowance for an additional €59 million for Mental Health Services for 2018. This includes pay-related costs of €24 million, €20 million to further progress the new initiatives commenced in 2017, and the €15 million for new developments above.

This increase will result in a Mental Health Budget of €912.1 million, an increase of €200 million, or 28%, since 2012. In addition, the Minister for Health has committed to a further €55 million to be made available for mental health services in 2019.

Mental Health Services Funding

351. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if the additional €15 million for mental health projects in 2017 will have a full year value of €35 million in 2018. [43722/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I can confirm the €15 million in budget 2017 combined with the continuing funding of €20 million in budget 2018 will have a full year value of €35 million in 2018. I can also confirm that a further €15 million has been included in budget 2018, and further spending of €55 million in 2019. This will bring spending on new developments in mental health to a total of €105 million over the three-year period, 2017-2019.

Mental Health Services Funding

352. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health with regard to the additional €35 million announced for mental health in budget 2018 the amount of this that is related to the full year value of the €15 million increase announced in 2017. [43723/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Budget 2017 made allowance for an additional €35 million for services to be initiated in 2017 and continued in

2018. €15 million was provided as part of the overall 2017 Budget. This recognised the time-frame required to initiate new developments, the time lag of new staff taking up posts and the completion of preparations for the introduction and enhancement of key priorities as specified in the HSE's 2017 Service Plan. These include youth mental health, further improvement to child and adolescent (CAMHS) and adult services, older people's Mental Health services and further enhanced out of hours response for those in need of urgent services.

Budget 2018 made allowance for an additional €59 million for Mental Health Services for 2018. €35 million is made up of the €20 million continuing cost in 2018 of developments initiated in 2017, combined with a further €15 million for further new developments. €24 million will fund pay-related costs. In addition, the Minister for Health has committed to a further €55 million to be made available for mental health services in 2019.

Mental Health Services Funding

353. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the mental health budget of €885 million in 2018 announced in his Department's budget press release reflects an increase of €35 million on 2017 in view of the fact that the HSE's 2017 mental health operational plan projected a budget of €853.7 million in 2018 [43724/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): Budget 2018 made allowance for an additional €59 million for Mental Health Services for 2018. €35 million is made up of the €20 million continuing cost in 2018 of developments initiated in 2017, combined with a further €15 million for further new developments. €24 million will fund pay-related costs. In addition, the Minister for Health has committed to a further €55 million to be made available for mental health services in 2019.

This increase will result in a Mental Health Budget of €912.1 million, an increase of €200 million, or 28%, since 2012. In addition, the Minister for Health has committed to a further €55 million to be made available for mental health services in 2019.

Question No. 354 answered with Question No. 280.

Hospital Appointments Delays

355. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) in County Donegal had an appointment cancelled at Our Lady's children's hospital, Crumlin; when another appointment will be issued to this person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43747/17]

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 specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Mental Health Services Funding

356. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the amount of additional funding as part of budget 2018 which will be made available for dementia care; the additional number of home care packages which will be provided in 2018; the number of additional dementia advisers and dementia care co-ordinators that will be recruited in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43762/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Department of Health is working with the HSE to prepare the 2018 National Service Plan. Pending agreement of the National Service Plan, I am not in a position to comment either on the funding that will be made available for dementia care or the specific services that will be provided.

An evaluation of the Dementia Advisers employed by the Alzheimer Society of Ireland has commenced. It would be appropriate to await the outcome of this evaluation before considering the appointment of additional advisers. The National Dementia Office is examining the role of Key Worker for people with dementia, a commitment outlined in the National Dementia Strategy. There are a number of potential models and approaches and the NDO is currently identifying these with a view to determining a suitable approach to this action under the Strategy.

The Department of Health and the HSE are working on a mid-term review 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 in 2018 and beyond.

National Drugs Strategy Budget

357. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the funding being provided in 2018 for the national drugs strategy; the amount of funding for each task force, project and programme to be funded in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43763/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The Government's response to addressing substance misuse in Ireland is set out in *Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery - A health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017-2020*. The strategy emphasises a health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland, based on providing person-centred services that promote rehabilitation and recovery. It identifies a set of key actions to be delivered between 2017 and 2020, and provides an opportunity for the development of further actions from 2021 to 2025 to address needs that may emerge later on in the lifetime of the strategy.

The key health-related priorities for 2018 under *Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery* and the associated resource requirements will be determined in the context of the development of the HSE National Service Plan. The amount of funding available to each Task Force, Project and Programme in 2018 will also be determined by the Department of Health, in conjunction with the HSE.

Drug Treatment Programmes

358. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide capital funding through the HSE in 2018 and 2019 for a residential treatment centre (details supplied) in Dublin 8. [43764/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The Health Service Executive (HSE) has an agreed process in place for the agreement and prioritisation of

projects that are proposed for inclusion in the Capital Plan for 2018. Any proposals must be considered in the context of the capital funding available to the Department of Health. Priority for funding must be based on verified service needs. The HSE will continue to apply the available funding for capital developments in the most effective way possible to meet current and future needs, having regard to the level of commitments and the costs to completion already in place.

Health Insurance

359. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding health insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43779/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Periods of cover on health insurance plans held outside the State are not taken into account for the purposes of waiting periods, as such plans do not comply with health insurance legislation or the key principles of community rating, open enrolment, lifetime cover and minimum benefit on which the Irish private health insurance regulatory system is based.

Community rating is a fundamental cornerstone of the Irish health insurance system and means that people who are old or sick do not have to pay more than the young and healthy. In other health insurance systems the level of risk that an individual presents directly affects the premium paid. Thus, different health insurance systems are not directly comparable or related, so periods of cover or time served as an insured person elsewhere are not interchangeable with the Irish regulatory system.

Any individual who takes out health insurance as a new entrant, whether resident here or returning from abroad, may have to serve waiting periods before they are fully covered (detailed in the following table). The application of waiting periods helps support community rating and is an important tool for insurers to combat practices where someone could potentially take out a health insurance policy to avail of a particular treatment and then cancel the policy once treatment had been received, without either penalty or sustained contribution to the community-rated system.

New Customer Maximum Waiting Periods

Accident and Injuries	Illnesses that commence after you join	Illnesses that commence before you join	Maternity related claims
None	26 weeks	5 years	52 weeks

Hospital Appointments Status

360. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Clare will receive a surgery appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43794/17]

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 specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Hospital Services

361. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the status of the planned national narcolepsy service centre at St. James's Hospital, Dublin; if funding has been set aside for the infrastructure for the project, staffing and recruitment for this centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43801/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Work is under way on the setting up a Centre of Excellence for Narcolepsy based in St. James's Hospital for patients with all forms of narcolepsy in adults and in children transitioning from the paediatric services. Funding for the infrastructure, staffing and recruitment for this centre will be considered as part of the overall service plan process 2018 and with regard to competing priorities for resources available in 2018.

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

362. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the status of the delivery of a suitable buggy for a person (details supplied); the expected delivery date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43807/17]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

363. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a date for surgery. [43814/17]

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

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

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

Hospital Appointments Delays

364. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) will be called for specialised treatment without delay in view of the fact that they have now

been waiting 18 months for an appointment. [43815/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Delays

365. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if an admission date will be put in place for a person (details supplied) who is now waiting over three years for a medical procedure. [43818/17]

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 Services

366. **Deputy Fergus O’Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the laundry department in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda; his short to medium-term plans for the department; if a commitment can be given to the laundry staff regarding their job security in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43842/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Services Executive have advised that Phase 2 of the development in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda is currently in the final stages of construction. This consists of an extension on the ground floor, three wards and a theatre suite comprising of five operating rooms. Any plans regarding the laundry services cannot fully be considered until this construction project is complete and brought on line.

In the context of last week’s Budget announcements, the development of Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda has been identified as a project for funding in 2018. The Department will be engaging with the HSE and the RCSI Hospital Group regarding the development of a plan in the coming weeks.

In response to the particular queries raised, relating to service matters, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

HIV Incidence

367. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health the number of HIV infections detected per year since 2011; the number of new HIV infections detected to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43844/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy may be aware, the HSE - Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) is Ireland's specialist agency for the surveillance of communicable diseases. The HPSC published the 2016 HIV report on 3 October and can be found on their website: www.hpsc.ie/a-z/hivstis/hivandaids/hivdataandreports/.

I have asked the Health Service Executive to reply directly to the Deputy providing figures for the number of HIV infections detected from 2011 to date.

Medicinal Products Prices

368. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health further to the HSE decision to contract a consultancy firm to review pharmacy schemes, the HSE's plans to include pharmacists and pharmacy owners in this process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43855/17]

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 Closure

369. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health when provisions will be made in order to finalise and introduce a replacement for the motorised transport grant and mobility allowance scheme which were scrapped over four years ago under the premise of a new replacement scheme to be announced shortly thereafter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43875/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I was pleased to have the opportunity to discuss the proposed Health (Transport Support) Bill with the Joint Committee on Public Petitions on Wednesday 11th October. The Deputy will be familiar with the background to the closure of both the Mobility Allowance and Motorised Transport Grant schemes in February 2013. Since the closure of the Mobility Allowance, the Government has directed that the Health Service Executive should continue to pay an equivalent monthly payment of up to €208.50 per month to the 4,700 people in receipt of the Mobility Allowance, on an interim basis, pending the establishment of a new Transport Support Scheme.

The Government decided that the detailed preparatory work required for a new Transport Support Scheme and associated statutory provisions should be progressed by the Minister for Health. The *Programme for a Partnership Government* acknowledges the ongoing drafting of primary legislation for a new Transport Support Scheme to assist those with a disability to meet their mobility costs. The Government's legislative programme for 2017 includes the Health (Transport Support) Bill. 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 draft General Scheme and Heads of Bill were circulated to other government Departments and have been the subject of consultation between the Department of Health and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. When the consultation with other relevant Departments has been completed, the next step will be to seek Government approval to the drafting of a Bill for the new Scheme.

It is important to note that the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers scheme operated by the Revenue Commissioners, remains in place. This scheme provides VRT and VAT relief, an exemption from road tax and a fuel grant to drivers and passengers with a disability, who qualify under the relevant criteria set out in governing regulations made by the Minister for Finance.

Specifically adapted vehicles driven by disabled persons are also exempt from payment of tolls on national toll roads and toll bridges. Transport Infrastructure Ireland has responsibility for this particular Scheme.

Orthodontic Services Data

370. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons awaiting orthodontic treatment at a hospital (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43876/17]

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

Hospital Staff

371. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the reason for a vacant clinical nurse specialist post at Tallaght hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43877/17]

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.

Mental Health Services Data

372. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide a list of psychiatric units in the country; the number of residents in each of these units at the end of the most recent month for which information is available; the number suffering from Alzheimer's or dementia; his views on whether a psychiatric setting is the appropriate place in these situations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43879/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Status

373. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health the status of a dermatologist ap-

pointment for a person (details supplied) in County Carlow; if it can be brought forward; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43883/17]

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 specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Questions No. 374 to 376, inclusive, answered with Question No. 278.

Health Services

377. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if he will examine and address the situation in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43888/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Obesity Strategy

378. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when the food reformulation working group will be established; when the membership will be determined; if public health organisations will be involved; when the draft terms of reference will be prepared for this technical group; when it will be convened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43889/17]

379. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the way the reformulation efforts will be monitored in view of the introduction of the sugar sweetened drinks tax in April 2018; the role the FSAI will have in this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43890/17]

380. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when a report on validation of the sugar and fat reduction will be published; the timeframe for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43891/17]

381. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when data for 2013 onwards will be collected, verified and published in respect of reformulation information on reduction of sugar in still and carbonated drinks (details supplied); the way in which the FSAI is working with the food and drink industry on this currently; if this will be monitored officially aside from the ad hoc manner it is done currently in which an industry organisation (details supplied) meets with the FSAI periodically at the industry's request to seek its input into the industry's reformulation work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43892/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 378 to 381, inclusive, together.

The reformulation of foods, particularly those high in fat, sugar and salt is a priority area in the National Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025. Plans by the Department to establish an Obesity Policy Implementation Group for the National Policy and Action Plan are well

advanced. The first meeting of this cross-sectoral group is expected to take place this month.

A number of working groups will be established within this overall national oversight structure - including a technical one on food reformulation, which will also explore approaches to food portion sizes. The establishment of this working group and its attributes (membership, Terms of Reference, date of first meeting, etc) shall be a function of the decision making process of the national Obesity Policy Implementation Group.

Ireland is actively involved in the EU Food Reformulation Project and is represented by my Department on the EU High Level Group on Nutrition and Physical Activity. The EU High Level Group is agreeing EU targets for reformulation of foods and beverages with Member States across Europe.

In relation to FSAI's work in this area, it continues to sample a range of foods testing for salt, independently of the food industry, and post the information on its website www.fsai.ie.

It has analysed declared sugar and fat levels on labels of yogurt and breakfast cereal and presented these findings at the summer meeting of the Irish Nutrition Society. A full report on this is due for publication in the coming weeks. Independent testing of foods for fat and sugar content has not yet started as it requires the use of external laboratories and will be looked at in 2018 depending on resources.

FSAI has had periodic meetings with the FDI regarding reformulation in 2017.

In October 2016, the Department published a Health Rationale on the introduction of a tax on sugar sweetened drinks. This document explored options for measuring and evaluating the impact of such a tax.

It specified that a high quality evaluation should seek to examine the impact of the tax on purchasing, consumption and associated health outcomes such as BMI; a review of sales data on all SSD classified products would inform how the tax would be shaped in future years; a review of ongoing population-based nutrition surveillance data, building on the Healthy Ireland survey, where additional data relating to SSD consumption and consumption of other food and beverage items would be included, along with other nutrition surveillance datasets; and a review and report on the levels and trends in the population would be important.

Furthermore, the report added that further research tracking public reaction and acceptability would be helpful. This approach will be considered over the coming months to develop an effective methodology to monitor and evaluate the impact of the SSD tax, including its impact on reformulation.

Hospital Appointments Status

382. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if an admission date for a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [43895/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient

has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Mental Health Services Funding

383. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the funding spent by CAMHS in CHO area 9 in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43905/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Health Services Staff Data

384. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the number of full-time community ophthalmologists in CHO area 9 in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017; if this number will be increased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43906/17]

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 and Social Care Professionals Regulation

385. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the regulation of counselling and psychotherapy professionals; when this process will be complete; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43919/17]

395. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health the outcome of the consultations which took place with an organisation (details supplied) in relation to the designation by regulation of the professions of counsellor and psychotherapist under section 4(2) of the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 to enable him to regulate designating the professions to be regulated and prescribing the titles to be protected [43948/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 385 and 395 together.

Following consultation with the Health and Social Care Professionals Council, as required under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005, I undertook a wider public consultation on my proposal to regulate counsellors and psychotherapists under the Act. The Council's submission and those of the respondents to the public consultation are available on my Department's website, www.health.gov.ie. On foot of these consultations, I decided to proceed with the designation of two distinct professions under the Act, that of counsellor and psychotherapist. Each will have its own register under one registration board. This decision was communicated to the Health and Social Care Professionals Council, the relevant professional bodies and all the respondents to the public consultation process. I expect that the draft regulations to designate the professions and to establish the registration board will be ready for submission to the Houses of the Oireachtas in the coming weeks. Subject to the approval of the Houses,

the next step will be the appointment of the 13 members of the registration board following the submission of suitable candidates for my consideration by the Public Appointments Service. I hope that the registration board will be in a position early next year to begin the task of drafting the various by-laws to allow it to establish its registers.

Hospital Appointments Status

386. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43920/17]

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

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

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

Occupational Therapy Staff

387. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Health when the replacement for the occupational therapist for the Finglas area on maternity leave will be put in place (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43921/17]

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.

Public Procurement Contracts

388. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the procurement process entered into by the HSE before the engagement of an organisation (details supplied); the requirements for qualification, duration of contract or engagement and qualifications required by applicants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43922/17]

389. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the references that were sought and provided from applicants in the competition in which an organisation (details supplied) was selected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43923/17]

390. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the payments made to an organisation (details supplied) in each year in respect of its engagement by the HSE; and if he

will make a statement on the matter. [43924/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 388 to 390, inclusive, together.

As the issues raised are operational matters, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Drugs Payment Scheme Coverage

391. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the medicines that have been removed by the MMP from the community drugs scheme; the amount the medicine cost the State before it was removed; the amount saved after its removal; and the number of persons receiving it before the medicine was removed from the list, in tabular form. [43931/17]

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.

Medical Card Applications

392. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if an application for a medical card by a person (details supplied) will be expedited; the timeframe for a decision to issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43936/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

393. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health if an earlier appointment could be provided for a person (details supplied). [43938/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

394. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Health if the assessment process to include

a device (details supplied) for testing blood glucose levels for listing under reimbursable items for persons with diabetes that intensively use insulin (details supplied) is completed, in view of the fact that the application was acknowledged by the primary care reimbursement service of the Health Service Executive on 6 February 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43942/17]

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. 395 answered with Question No. 385.

Drug Treatment Programmes

396. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce suboxone for the treatment of narcotic addiction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43952/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): In January 2016, the Director General of the HSE submitted the final report of the Opioid Substitution Implementation Group to the Minister of State with responsibility for the national drugs strategy. The report recommends the phased increased access to buprenorphine/naloxone (Suboxone) for groups of patients in specific circumstances, subject to resourcing and the required legislation being enacted.

Approximately 80 people currently receive suboxone for opioid dependence and are registered on the Central Treatment List (CTL) on an informal basis. For the feasibility study, the CTL was required to set up, manage and maintain a separate national database for all clients in receipt of buprenorphine/naloxone treatment. However unlike the CTL for Methadone this does not yet have a statutory footing.

Drafting of new regulations to provide the same restrictions to the prescribing and dispensing of buprenorphine/naloxone and buprenorphine only for opioid dependence as apply to methadone is at an advanced stage. As buprenorphine has more “every day” uses than methadone (it is widely used as a painkiller both in the community and hospital settings) and is available in a wide variety of forms, the Regulations will need to ensure that the additional controls which apply to methadone do not interfere with the current use of buprenorphine for other clinical indications and avoid any unintended consequences.

It is expected that the regulations will be finalised in the coming weeks. The regulations will then be subject to the 3-month EU notification under the Technical Standards and Regulations Directive 2015/1535/EU.

An additional €750,000 has been allocated to the HSE to facilitate the phased increase in the use of Suboxone this year.

Drug and Alcohol Task Forces

397. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Health the allocation of funding that each of the local drugs and alcohol task forces received, in tabular form. [43953/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): The budget allocation for the twenty four Local and Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Forces from the Drugs Initiative of the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive for 2015 to 2017

is set out in the table hereunder:

LDATF	2015 DOH	2015 HSE	2016 DOH	2016 HSE	2017 DOH	2017 HSE
Ballyfermot	€255,446	€1,231,286	€255,446	€1,231,286	€255,446	€1,231,286
Ballymun	€422,958	€697,957	€422,958	€697,957	€422,958	€697,957
Blanchardstown	€179,305	€913,589	€179,305	€913,589	€179,305	€913,589
Bray	€573,860	€916,271	€573,860	€916,271	€573,860	€916,271
Canal Communities	€338,605	€1,141,309	€338,605	€1,141,309	€338,605	€1,141,309
Clondalkin	€388,114	€1,007,948	€388,114	€1,007,948	€388,114	€1,007,948
Cork	€411,988	€1,108,299	€411,988	€1,108,299	€411,988	€1,108,299
Dublin 12	€70,997	€993,150	€70,397	€993,750	€70,397	€993,750
Dublin NE	€422,251	€594,836	€239,971	€777,116	€239,971	€777,116
Dun Laoghaire	€94,676	€786,755	€94,676	€786,755	€94,676	€786,755
Finglas Cabra	€263,277	€627,960	€263,277	€627,960	€263,277	€627,960
NIC	€494,856	€1,734,723	€394,856	€1,834,723	€394,856	€1,834,723
SIC	€176,043	€1,868,014	€176,043	€1,868,014	€176,043	€1,868,014
Tallaght	€341,438	€893,514	€336,022	€898,930	€336,022	€898,930
Total LDATF	€4,433,814	€14,515,611	€4,145,518	€14,803,907	€4,145,518	€14,803,907
RDATF	2015 DOH	2015 HSE	2016 DOH	2016 HSE	2017 DOH	2017 HSE
East Coast Area	€58,200	€508,500	€58,200	€508,500	€58,200	€508,500
Midland	€136,816	€662,491	€136,816	€662,491	€136,816	€662,491
Mid-West	€147,982	€1,260,007	€147,982	€1,260,007	€147,982	€1,260,007
North East	€0	€927,813	€0	€927,813	€0	€927,813
North West	€258,633	€461,730	€258,633	€461,730	€258,633	€461,730
North Dublin City & Co.	€309,778	€467,486	€266,245	€511,019	€266,245	€511,019
South East	€0	€1,065,760	€0	€1,065,760	€0	€1,065,760
South West	€102,820	€696,497	€102,820	€696,497	€102,820	€696,497
Southern	€0	€973,178	€0	€973,178	€0	€973,178
Western	€136,994	€524,155	€136,994	€524,155	€136,994	€524,155
Total RDATF	€1,151,223	€7,547,617	€1,107,690	€7,591,150	€1,107,690	€7,591,150
Overall Total	€27,648,265		€27,648,265		€27,648,265	

Hospital Appointments Delays

398. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of orthopaedic surgeries scheduled for Merlin Park University Hospital, Galway, that have been cancelled from 1 January 2017 to date due to problems with the roof in the theatre; the length of time the theatre will be closed for; the estimated future number of cancellations while the theatre is closed; the number of persons affected by this issue who are from County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43966/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): On Wednesday 4 October, I met with the Saolta Hospital Group Management, representatives of the consultant orthopaedic surgeons at the Hospital, HSE Acute Hospitals and Estate Divisions as well as local T.D.s to discuss the next steps in addressing the issue.

The Saolta Group has advised that it is working with the orthopaedic surgeons and staff of the Hospital and more widely across Galway University Hospitals to implement solutions pending completion of the repairs.

Interim solutions being progressed include: utilising additional bed capacity at University Hospital Galway to enable some further elective procedures to be carried out; engaging with local private hospitals regarding the potential to access theatre capacity to carry out orthopaedic surgery; and engaging the hospitals within the Saolta Group, in other Hospital Groups and the NTPF regarding capacity at other hospitals.

Furthermore, the Saolta Group and HSE Estates are working to progress the deployment of a mobile theatre unit at Merlin Park Hospital as quickly as possible.

The Saolta Group and HSE have committed to provide a contingency plan that deals with service demand.

I acknowledge the upset that this suspension of service has caused the patients affected and their family. The Saolta Group and the HSE have assured me that they are committed to resolving the issue as quickly as possible. In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly.

Hospital Waiting Lists

399. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on the waiting list for orthopaedic surgeries in Merlin Park University Hospital, Galway; the number of persons on this waiting list from County Mayo; the average waiting time for orthopaedic surgeries before the theatre was closed; the revised average waiting time for such surgeries in the aftermath of the theatre closure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43967/17]

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

Hospital Appointments Delays

400. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons affected by the cancellation of orthopaedic surgeries in Merlin Park University Hospital, Galway, due to the closure of the theatre who will be treated in other hospitals; the number of persons who will be treated by each hospital; if there are surgeries that cannot be performed in other hospitals in the region due to the fact that the necessary equipment for some surgeries is only found in Merlin Park University Hospital, Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43968/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Saolta University Healthcare Group has advised that a leak developed in the roof of a building in the Merlin Park hospital campus that houses the Hospital's two orthopaedic theatres on the 4th of September. Hospital management temporarily suspended operations for a week to facilitate the Galway University Hospital Buildings and Maintenance Unit to effect repairs.

Following discovery of a second leak on the 13 of September, a multi-disciplinary team in the Saolta Group, consisting of Hospital Management and Infection Control staff and HSE Estates took the decision to suspend elective orthopaedic surgical services in Merlin Park Hospital. There has been no elective surgical procedures carried out at Merlin Park since that date. Saolta and the University Hospital Galway management team have engaged an external engineering

firm to carry out a full assessment of the damage and provide a time-frame for the completion of repairs. Hospital Management advise that they are contacting patients whose procedures have been deferred to explain the situation and assure those patients of the Hospital's commitment to ensuring they are rescheduled in as timely a manner as possible.

On Wednesday 4 October, I met with the Saolta Hospital Group Management, representatives of the consultant orthopaedic surgeons at the Hospital, HSE Acute Hospitals and Estate Divisions as well as local T.D.s to discuss the next steps in addressing the issue.

The Saolta Group has advised that it is working with the orthopaedic surgeons and staff of the Hospital and more widely across Galway University Hospitals to implement solutions pending completion of the repairs.

Interim solutions being progressed include: utilising additional bed capacity at University Hospital Galway to enable some further elective procedures to be carried out; engaging with local private hospitals regarding the potential to access theatre capacity to carry out orthopaedic surgery; and engaging the hospitals within the Saolta Group, in other Hospital Groups and the NTPF regarding capacity at other hospitals.

Furthermore, the Saolta Group and HSE Estates are working to progress the deployment of a mobile theatre unit at Merlin Park Hospital as quickly as possible.

The Saolta Group and HSE have committed to provide a contingency plan that deals with service demand.

I acknowledge the upset that this suspension of service has caused the patients affected and their family. The Saolta Group and the HSE have assured me that they are committed to resolving the issue as quickly as possible. In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly.

Question No. 401 answered with Question No. 280.

Hospital Appointments Status

402. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will receive a new appointment from the Mater hospital for surgery; the reason the original appointment was cancelled by the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43980/17]

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 specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

403. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if the drug Kuvan sapropterin will be approved for reimbursement for those diagnosed with the genetic condition phenylketonuria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44017/17]

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 Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

In reaching a decision, the HSE examines all the evidence which may be relevant in its view for the decision and will take into account such expert opinions and recommendations which may have been sought by the HSE, including, for example, advice from the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

Sapropterin (Kuvan) was previously considered under the national pricing and reimbursement processes in 2009. At that time, insufficient evidence was available to support the pricing and reimbursement application submitted by Merck Serono.

In December 2015, Merck Serono advised the HSE that the market authorisation for sapropterin was transferring to Biomarin in 2016. The HSE met with the new market authorisation holder in May 2016 and was advised that it would be submitting a health technology assessment dossier in relation to sapropterin.

The NCPE assessment of the new dossier was completed on the 15 September 2017 and the NCPE did not recommend sapropterin for reimbursement as it was not deemed cost effective.

The HSE assessment process is ongoing and the HSE will take into account any relevant expert advice when making its decision, in line with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

Questions Nos. 404 to 408, inclusive, answered with Question No. 277.

Departmental Bodies Data

409. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the State bodies or boards that fall under the remit of his Department; and the number of members of each State body or board who are not qualified within the field in which the board or body has oversight. [43408/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): There are twelve State Bodies under the aegis of my Department, as listed. Vacancies on the Boards of these twelve bodies, other than those which are filled on the basis of nominations from specified organisations*, are advertised and processed by the Public Appointments Service (PAS). In this regard, an Information Booklet is prepared for each vacancy which, among other matters, sets out the skills and experience necessary for the position(s) being filled. This Booklet is prepared in consultation with the Chairman of the Board of the State Body who also sits on the Assessment Panel which considers all applications. Only applicants deemed to satisfy the qualifying criteria for positions advertised are shortlisted for final consideration for appointment by me.

Board members are therefore appointed on the basis of the specific knowledge, skills, experiences and expertise they bring to the deliberations of the Board and its committees. I am satisfied that the Board members of the State Bodies under my Department's aegis are suitably qualified to carry out the functions for which they have been appointed.

*In the case of the Aquaculture Licensing Appeals Board, Bord Bia, Horse Racing Ireland, the National Milk Agency, Teagasc and the Veterinary Council of Ireland, some of the board appointments are made on the basis of nominations from various organisations, as specified in the relevant statutes.

State Bodies under the aegis of Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

- Aquaculture Licensing Appeals Board
- Bord Bia
- Bord Iascaigh Mhara
- Bord na gCon
- Coillte
- Horse Racing Ireland
- Irish National Stud
- Marine Institute
- National Milk Agency
- Sea Fisheries Protection Authority
- Teagasc
- Veterinary Council of Ireland

Rural Development Programme

410. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will extend membership of the monitoring committee for Ireland's rural development programme 2014 to 2020 to an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43450/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I met with members of the INHFA on Tuesday, 26 September, and had a wide-ranging discussion with them on many issues including their application for membership of the Monitoring Committee for the Rural Development Programme.

The Monitoring Committee was established at the outset of the Programme in 2015, in accordance with regulatory requirements, and comprises diverse and representative group of stakeholders. It has not been the practice to co-opt new members during the Programming period, however notwithstanding that I am prepared to consider the INHFA's request for membership.

In considering the membership of any new group for such an important Committee, it is important the applicant group provides the necessary assurances that it is here for the long-term and is an authoritative and a coherent voice for a representative group of farmers. I discussed this in detail with the INHFA at the recent meeting and agreed the necessary next steps that must be taken in this process. The INHFA has agreed to submit their Articles of Association, number of members and any other supporting documentation/information which speaks to the durability, coherence and permanence of their group.

On receipt of this correspondence, I will consider the matter further and will as soon as possible revert to the INHFA with my decision. I have also written to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine in relation to this matter and to update on the procedure

outlined above, given their support for the INHFA membership of RDP Monitoring Committee.

Property Registration

411. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will review and provide an update on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43511/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Officials in the Lands Branch of my Department are actively engaging with the Property Registration Authority regarding this matter and will reply directly to the solicitor involved when the issue has been resolved.

GLAS Payments

412. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a GLAS balancing payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43524/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 2 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016 and has been paid the 85% advance payment for 2016.

During the processing of the 15% 2016 balance payment an issue presented on the computerised crosscheck of Department databases. Department officials are actively working to resolve this issue with a view to releasing the outstanding payment as soon as possible.

GLAS Payments

413. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS 2016 payment for a person (details supplied) in County Leitrim; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43530/17]

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.

The applicant has received their 2015 GLAS payment in full. The 85% advance payment for 2016 has recently been paid. The claim will now move to validation checks for the processing of the remaining 15% 2016 balance payment.

Agriculture Scheme Penalties

414. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a decision has been made on a GLAS penalty appeal in respect of persons (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43557/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The persons named were approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and were paid the First Instalment Payment for 2015.

The applicants wrote to the Department to advise that they wished to withdraw from GLAS 1 and sought entry to GLAS 3. The Department processed this request along with a claw back of the 2015 payment in line with the terms and conditions of the Scheme.

The Department has not received any appeal in relation to this case.

Herd Data

415. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of beef suckler cows and dairy cows, respectively, based on latest data, in each of the years from 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form. [43558/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Irish beef and dairy herds make an enormous contribution to the value of Ireland's agri-food industry. Since 2010, the value of Irish beef exports has increased from €1.57 billion to €2.38 billion, the value of dairy exports has increased from €2.27 billion to €3.82 billion. The growth in the value of exports has been realised despite the challenges the sectors have encountered, the most recent of which is of course the uncertainty arising from Brexit.

The following table details the dairy and suckler herd numbers as extracted from the June Crops and Livestock survey from the Central Statistics Office.

Year	Dairy	Suckler
2010	1,071,000	1,158,000
2011	1,117,000	1,123,000
2012	1,141,000	1,147,000
2013	1,163,000	1,150,000
2014	1,226,000	1,129,000
2015	1,296,000	1,076,000
2016	1,398,000	1,104,000
2017	1,433,000	1,081,000

Forestry Data

416. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the planting targets, in hectares, per year on an annual basis in each of the years from 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; the number of hectares planted in each year; and the number of hectares planted out of each annual target set on a percentage basis. [43559/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The National Development Plan 2007-2013 set out planting targets for the period 2007 - 2013 at 10,000 ha per annum. The figure for 2014 is based on the maximum planting level achievable within the budget provided that year, which was 7,000 ha. Targets for 2015 - 2020 are set out in the Forestry Programme 2014 - 2020. The following table lists these figures.

Year	Target	Planted (ha)	% of target achieved
2010	10,000	8,314	83%
2011	10,000	6,653	67%
2012	10,000	6,652	67%
2013	10,000	6,252	63%

Year	Target	Planted (ha)	% of target achieved
2014	7,000	6,156	88%
2015	6,000	6,293	105%
2016	6,660	6,500	98%
2017*	7,140	4,259 up to 6 October	

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

417. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the overpayments made to a person (details supplied) under the AEOS 2 scheme 2011 will be examined with a view to minimising the amount of overpayment calculated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43594/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named joined AEOS 2 on 16 May 2011 with actions of Species Rich Grassland and Traditional Stonewall Maintenance.

Following an inspection, which was carried out on 15 September 2015, the total eligible area found for Species Rich Grassland was 5.35 ha. The area claimed by the Scheme participant was 6.69 ha. The overclaim of 1.34 ha amounted to 25% of the eligible area found of 5.35 ha. Therefore, this resulted in a 100% penalty being applied and no payments for the Species Rich Grassland.

The Inspector issued a letter to the applicant on 11 January 2016 outlining the findings and the decision that penalties and a clawback of undue payments would be applied. The letter also offered the right of appeal to the Regional Inspector by 29 January 2016, if the Scheme participant so wished.

There is no evidence to indicate that an appeal was submitted to the Regional Inspector. This case has now been finalised with all outstanding overpayments and penalties having been recouped.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments

418. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a farm payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43618/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the 2017 Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) Scheme was received in my Department from the person named on 17 April 2017.

Under the 2017 ANC Scheme, eligible applicants are required to have met a minimum stocking density of 0.15 livestock units per hectare for a retention period of seven consecutive months and to maintain an annual average of 0.15 livestock units per hectare calculated over the twelve months of the scheme year. Payment under the ANC scheme has not issued in this case as, at this stage, the person concerned has not satisfied the scheme's minimum stocking density requirements.

An official from my Department has been in direct contact with the advisor of the person

named to advise him of the outstanding issue. The requested documentation in relation to this issue has not been received in the Department to date. However, I understand that the documentation is now being forwarded and on receipt of this documentation the application will be further reviewed.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments

419. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43621/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the 2017 Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme was received from the person named on 27 April 2017. Processing of the application is now completed and payment will issue directly to the nominated bank account of the person named shortly.

Beef Data and Genomics Programme

420. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there will be an increase in funding of at least €25 million for the beef data and genomics programme, to bring it to €200 per animal (details supplied). [43670/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am very conscious of the importance of the suckler herd to the Irish economy and agri-food sector in particular.

I have been very active in highlighting the potentially very damaging impact of a Mercosur deal on the European and Irish beef sectors and in turn potential impact on the Irish suckler sector.

The Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) provides farmers with some €300 million of funding over the next six years. I will continue to support fully this programme through the lifetime of the current RDP.

Earlier this year I re-opened BDGP for beef suckler farmers who were not already part of the scheme. This scheme (BDGP II) provides for six years of payments to farmers for completion of actions which deliver accelerated genetic improvement in the Irish national herd and improvement of its environmental sustainability. Payment rates and actions for participants in BDGP II are the same as those in the original scheme, with the exception that the training and carbon navigator actions must be completed by 31st October 2017. I currently cannot give any commitments to increase payments under this scheme.

EU State Aid Negotiations

421. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to seek an increase in EU state aid and to decrease the limits beyond the existing €15,000 to allow greater scope for targeted support to farmers. [43671/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I assume the deputy is referring to an increase (rather than a decrease) in EU state aid limits, beyond the

existing €15,000.

In March 2016, at the Agriculture Council of Ministers meetings, I requested an increase in the agriculture de minimis threshold limits from €15,000 to €20,000, as a direct response to the ongoing market difficulties being experienced by farmers. The European Commission indicated at the time, that it would need to conduct an impact assessment so as to ensure that any such increase would not cause any risk of distortion of competition and trade. Minister of State Doyle also raised the issue of state aids flexibility, against the background of Brexit, at the recent Council of Agriculture Ministers meeting in Luxembourg.

The European Commission launched an impact assessment on agricultural de minimis aid in July of this year. As part of its assessment, the Commission is looking at a number of options including:

- increasing the individual threshold limit of €15,000, ranging from €20,000 to €30,000; and
- increasing the national threshold limit, currently 1% of the annual agricultural output, by anything up to 2%.

The assessment will also examine whether the aid should be concentrated to just one or a few agricultural sectors; or, whether the aid should be spread evenly between all agricultural sectors. The baseline scenario is to maintain the ceilings currently fixed within Commission Regulation 1408/2013.

The Commission has set a target adoption date of April 2018 and I look forward to seeing the outcome of its assessment in due course.

GLAS Payments

422. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) has not received a GLAS payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43672/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1st October 2015. All 2015 payments have been paid to the applicant.

The 85% advance payment for 2016 has been processed and payment has issued to the person named.

During the processing of the 2016 balance payment an issue presented on the computerised crosscheck of Department databases. Department officials are actively working to resolve this issue with a view to further processing the application for the payment as soon as possible.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

423. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) has not received farm payments for 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43677/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An applica-

tion under the 2017 Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme was received from the person named on 19 April 2017.

Processing of the ANC application has been completed and payment has issued directly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Advance payments under the BPS have now commenced. The BPS application of the person named has been processed, and accordingly an advance payment has now issued.

In all cases, applicants should allow up to 4-5 days for payments to be processed to the relevant bank account.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

424. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) has not received farm payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43678/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the 2017 Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme was received from the person named on 11 May 2017.

Processing of the ANC application has been completed and payment has issued directly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Advance payments under the BPS have now commenced. The BPS application of the person named has been processed, and accordingly an advance payment has now issued.

In all cases, applicants should allow up to 4-5 days for payments to be processed to the relevant bank account.

Fish Farming

425. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he is satisfied with the number of salmon farm inspections conducted by his Department's marine engineers to date in 2017; the measures he is taking to eliminate or reduce farmed salmon escapes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43679/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department's Marine Engineering Division carries out an inspection programme of salmon farms on an annual basis. It is expected that the programme for 2017 will be completed by the end of the year.

In April 2016, my Department introduced a Protocol for the Structural Design of Marine Finfish Farms. This Protocol will help to protect against the likelihood of structural failure and will assist in the prevention of salmon farm escapes.

Fish Farming

426. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on farmed salmon being caught in the rivers Delphi, Erriff, Kylemore-Dawros, Newport

and Bunowen catchments since August 2017, during a time when salmon farm owners did not file reports of escapes from cages; if he will initiate an investigation into the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43680/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has noted media reports of salmon being found in some rivers which may be from farmed stock. My Department has advised Inland Fisheries Ireland that where anglers or officers of Inland Fisheries Ireland suspect that they have collected salmon from farmed stock that the fish should be sent to the Marine Institute for analysis, with a view to determining whether they are actually from farmed stock.

If fish presented to the Marine Institute for analysis are determined to be from farmed stock my Department will, in the normal way, take appropriate action in the matter.

Fish Farming

427. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the recent statement by Inland Fisheries Ireland that 65 farmed salmon have been caught in five rivers in counties Galway and Mayo, in view of the fact that no escapes have been reported, despite the conditions of all aquaculture licences requiring operators to report all escapes to his Department within 24 hours; and if he is satisfied that the regime of regulatory oversight ensures public confidence in the effectiveness of his Department's protection of the environment (details supplied). [43714/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has noted media reports of salmon being found in some rivers which may be from farmed stock. My Department has advised Inland Fisheries Ireland that where anglers or officers of Inland Fisheries Ireland suspect that they have collected salmon from farmed stock that the fish should be sent to the Marine Institute for analysis, with a view to determining whether they are actually from farmed stock.

If fish presented to the Marine Institute for analysis are determined to be from farmed stock my Department will, in the normal way, take appropriate action in the matter.

Fishing Industry

428. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the overstocking reported in the 2015 to 2016 fin fish inspection reports by the marine engineering division, by site and number of fish. [43715/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The specific information requested by the Deputy will require a detailed examination of my Department's records and is therefore not readily available. The information sought will be forwarded to the Deputy within 2 weeks.

Fish Farming

429. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department will provide data when requested on fish farm stocking, losses, diseases and mortalities in numbers of fish and their weight, including responses to parliamentary questions, in

view of the fact that the Commissioner for Environmental Information (details supplied) is not of the view that numerical information regarding fish should be withheld from the public on grounds of commercial sensitivity. [43716/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department always responds to requests for information in as transparent a manner as possible consistent with the legislative restrictions applicable to information sought in individual cases including, but not limited to, environmental legislation, the Freedom of Information Act and legislation governing data protection.

Fish Farming

430. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 167 of 4 October 2017, if the percentage figures of losses he has provided refer to a percentage of the licensed capacity of the site or to the actual fish held. [43717/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has been advised by the Marine Institute that the reported mortalities are in respect of the actual stock held.

Aquaculture Licences

431. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Question No. 166 of 4 October 2017, the reason he is of the view that extreme weather conditions prevented the operators notifying his Department of 1 February 2014 storm damage to a fish farm (details supplied) until an email at 5.31 p.m. on 7 February 2014, six days after the accident, in view of the fact that telecommunications were restored within hours. [43718/17]

432. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Question No. 166 of 4 October 2017, the reason he is of the view that extreme weather conditions delayed the investigation of storm damage to a fish farm on 1 February 2014 (details supplied) in view of the fact that his Department's reports record that marine contractors spent the two days of 3 February and 4 February reshooting anchors, restoring cages and rearranging nets with the result that no conclusions as to mortalities or escapes could subsequently be reached. [43719/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 431 and 432 together.

As the Deputy has been advised, the extreme weather conditions prevalent at the time delayed the immediate investigation of the damage and whether escapes or mortalities had in fact occurred.

At all times, site surveys must be conducted in a manner which takes due account of the health and safety of the personnel involved.

Aquaculture Licence Applications

433. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Ma-

rine the status of an aquaculture licence for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43726/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department's records indicate that two applications have been received for Aquaculture Licences from the person referred to by the Deputy. The first application was received in November 2016 but it was subsequently returned to the applicant as it was incomplete. The completed application form and the necessary supporting documentation were returned to my Department in June 2017 and this application is being processed in the normal way.

My Department received a further application for an Aquaculture Licence from the same applicant in June 2017. During the verification process, my Department discovered an error of a technical nature with this application. This has been communicated to the applicant and a response is awaited.

Animal Welfare

434. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the maximum penalties available for convictions for animal cruelty; his plans to raise them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43851/17]

435. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of prosecutions there have been for animal cruelty in the past five years; the number of these which resulted in a conviction; the most stringent sentence imposed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43852/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 434 and 435 together.

The introduction of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 provided for increased levels of penalties for animal welfare offences committed. For major cases taken on indictment, the maximum penalty was increased from €100,000 to €250,000, with a maximum custodial sentence of five years imprisonment. These penalties are in keeping with Irish jurisprudence and therefore I do not envisage further changes at this time.

Penalties imposed upon successful conviction vary at the discretion of the court, with the Act containing provisions that where an individual convicted of serious animal welfare offences may be banned by the courts from keeping animals, or indeed have the numbers of animals they may keep restricted.

The Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 however has importantly changed the basis upon which animal owners must treat their animals and is specifically designed to allow early intervention in a much wider range of cases than the previous legislation allowed for. Thus minor cases can be tackled before they escalate and the Act is a vehicle to encourage and educate animal keepers. This new approach means that Authorised officers are addressing problems while they are relatively minor, reducing the risk of escalation.

Enforcement is a complex issue, so a progressive aspect of the Act is that it does not just focus on prosecution, which is only appropriate in cases where there have been serious welfare issues that can be clearly demonstrated to the courts. The new enforcement approach reflects the need to intervene as early as possible in animal welfare situations. This approach is aided by The Early Warning/Intervention System (EWS) initiative introduced by the Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council involving, amongst others, my Department, the Irish Farmers' Asso-

ciation and the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals which provides a framework within which farm animal welfare problems can be identified before they become critical or overwhelming.

The Act provides for Animal Health & Welfare Notices to be issued by Authorised Officers. This means that minor situations can be addressed at an early stage and that encouragement, guidance and best practice are introduced rather than just punishment. It also provides for Fixed Penalty Notices to be issued in minor cases and allows authorised officers to seize and re-home animals where the owner's capacity to care for their animals is being overwhelmed.

The provisions of the Act are enforced by Authorised officers of my Department, An Garda Síochána, officers of Customs & Excise and authorised officers of ISPCA and DSPCA, along with individual officers of the Turf Club. This approach provides a large cross section of experienced officials whom are aware of welfare issues and can flag them up as and when they arise.

Cases Taken From 2013 - 2017*

Taken - 105

Current - 29

Prosecuted - 42

*As the Deputy has requested figures covering the last five years, it should be noted that the Animal Health and Welfare Act commenced in March 2014 so some of the information in this reply pre-dates the Act. The maximum ban on keeping animals handed down by the courts since 2013 is two years while the maximum fine incurred was €6,000 plus costs. The Deputy should also be aware An Garda Síochána may initiate cases independently of my Department.

Agriculture Industry

436. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons directly and indirectly involved in agriculture and agriculture related employment in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43917/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The CSO published four Quarterly National Household Surveys (QNHS) for 2016, the fourth of which was released in February 2017. These showed that employment in the agri-food sector overall, including all its component parts, averaged 173,400 throughout the year. The agri-food sector represented circa 8.6% of national employment as measured by the QNHS.

The average figures for the years 2011 to 2016 are in the table. Annual figures for 2017 will be available with the release of the QNHS for Q4 2017, in February 2018.

2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
000s	000s	000s	000s	000s	000s
140.2	141.4	163.7	166.7	165.7	173.4

Source: CSO Quarterly National Household Survey

It should be noted that after each Census of Population the sample of households for the QNHS is updated to ensure that it remains representative. The sample based on the Census of Population 2011 was introduced incrementally from Q4 2012 to Q4 2013. The CSO's Employ-

ment in Agriculture Information Notice (June 2016) stressed that such changes in sample can lead to some level of variability in estimates, particularly at more detailed levels such as the above. Therefore, the CSO says caution is warranted in the interpretation of trends over the period of new samples being introduced and particularly so for the Agriculture sector figures.

Food Wise 2025, the new ten year strategy for the agri-food sector published in July 2015 identifies the opportunities and challenges facing the sector and provides an enabling strategy that will allow the sector to grow and prosper. Food Wise includes more than 400 specific recommendations, spread across the cross-cutting themes of sustainability, innovation, human capital, market development and competitiveness; as well as specific sectoral recommendations.

If these recommendations are implemented, the expert committee which drew up the Food Wise 2025 Strategy believes that the following growth projections are achievable by 2025: increasing the value of agri-food exports by 85% to €19 billion; increasing value added in the sector by 70% to in excess of €13 billion; and increasing the value of primary production by 65% to almost €10 billion. With regard to employment, Food Wise foresees the creation of 23,000 additional jobs in the agri-food sector all along the supply chain from primary production to high value added product development.

Research and Development Funding

437. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the proportion of the annual agriculture budget which is allocated for research and development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43918/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The funding provided for my Department's competitive research programme in 2017 amounts to €18.2 million. This funding covers the Food Institutional Research Measures (FIRM) €5.4m, Research Stimulus Funds (RSF) €11m and Competitive Forest Research for Development funds (CoFoRD) €1.8m.

The funding is provided, on a competitive basis, to public institutes in Ireland with a proven research performing capability, mainly Higher Education Institutes and research institutes and involves inter-institutional collaboration.

The research topics under FIRM cover food areas such as product development, processing, safety, nutrition and health encompassing both land and marine derived resources. Most of these projects are of 1-5 year duration.

Projects funded under RSF support sustainable and competitive agricultural production practices and policies and contribute to building and maintaining a knowledge economy and research capability in the agriculture sector. Most of these projects are funded for 3-5 years.

CoFoRD forestry research seeks to develop a scientific foundation and support for sustainable competitive, market orientated and innovative forestry industry. Projects are from 2 to 5 years duration.

I also provide €31.5m in funding to the Marine Institute to enable it to perform its core functions which include research and data collection underpinning the Common Fisheries Policy, coordinating, promoting and assisting in marine research and development and providing such services related to marine research and development that facilitate marine economic development while protecting the marine environment.

I have made a further €128.1m available to Teagasc which accounts for approximately 70% of its overall income in 2017. Its statutory role is the provision of integrated research, advisory and education services to the agriculture sector. An estimated €61.5m of Teagasc expenditure in 2017 is attributed to its research activities.

Forestry Sector

438. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on removing the restrictions on planting productive marginal land to ensure greater regional spread; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43925/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Most productive marginal land is already eligible for planting and many farmers avail of the generous grants and premiums on offer to plant their productive marginal land. There are some restrictions on planting land in designated areas and other environmentally sensitive areas. There is also a restriction on the proportion of unenclosed land, Grant Premium Category 1(GPC1) planted, capped at 20% in any one application.

Our analysis, based on previous planting figures, is that by lifting this 20% rule there will only be a modest increase in overall level of planting. This is also because the definition of GPC 1 land has narrowed, reducing the amount of land in this category. Also, the establishment grants do not cover the establishment costs for this GPC and annual premiums are much lower for the applicant. It follows therefore that removing the restrictions on planting this category of land will not lead to a significantly greater regional spread. However, my Department has held discussions with European Commission with the aim of removing the 20% rule and a final position has yet to be reached by the Commission. A further high level meeting between my Department and the Commission is scheduled for November 2017.

Afforestation Programme

439. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the reintroduction of farm forest premium differentials; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43927/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The current forestry programme does not differentiate between a “farmer” and “non-farmer” but targets funding at all landowners who wish to convert lands to forestry. It is important to note that the non-farmer category also includes recently retired farmers and the family members of existing farmers and on that basis I am satisfied that the vast bulk of forestry payments remain in rural Ireland. Reinstating the farmer/non-farmer forest premium differential is not an option being considered by the Department.

The reintroduction of such a differential could only be achieved either by an increase in the farmer rate or a reduction in the non-farmer rate. An increase in the premium rate for farmers is no guarantee of increased planting levels by farmers. The other option of reducing the non-farmer rate to create the differential could impact significantly on overall planting levels. This is borne out by planting figures in 2016 where the proportion of land planted by landowners classifying themselves as non-farmers was 36%.

The Forestry Programme 2014-2020 will continue to pay the same premium to all landowners to ensure that the maximum amount of land is available for afforestation. All lands

proposed for afforestation are assessed to the same silvicultural and environmental criteria irrespective of who owns the lands.

Afforestation Programme

440. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there is a way to proportionally compensate farmers for the land they are obliged to set aside for environmental enhancement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43928/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I understand that this question relates to land set aside as part of a forestry application. I believe the existing provisions to pay landowners for areas left unplanted for environmental reasons are proportionate and adequate.

Under the current Environmental Requirements for Afforestation, between 10-15% of the afforestation site must be treated with particular regard to biodiversity, comprising a combination of open spaces and retained habitats and this includes setbacks beside habitats, watercourses, setbacks beside public roads and archaeological monuments that are not planted.

Up to 15% of this land set aside as Areas for Biodiversity Enhancement or ABE's as they are known are fully eligible for grant and premium payments.

Where the area within an application has many areas not planted for environmental reasons, the Department under the afforestation scheme is limited to only paying on that amount of the unplanted area that amounts to 15% of the total project area. Situations do exist where, due to multiple sensitivities, the amount of area eligible for payment may exceed the 15% eligible area threshold, resulting in a landowner receiving a payment based on an area less than the gross area of the project. However, these represent a minority of cases and often, with good design, these ineligible areas can be excluded from the afforestation application and left as part of the open farm enterprise.

Forest Roads Scheme

441. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to reduce red tape in the forest road scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43929/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Forest Road Scheme is offered to farmers to facilitate harvesting of their crop of trees. The scheme which grant aids farmers to build private forest roads on their holding is important to enable the sector to fully mobilise the volume of timber in private hands.

Currently consent is required from my Department to build a forest road and in addition if the forest road requires a new entrance onto a public road planning permission from the Local Authority is also required. Following some negotiation with the relevant Departments there is consensus to have a single consent system operated by my Department. Following the commencement of the Forestry Act 2014 in May this year, my Department has been able to put in place an independent appeals mechanism which is an important step on the way to establishing a single consent system for forest roads. In order for the single consent system to take effect, a legislative change is required to the Planning and Development Act and this is expected to take place in 2017. This change in the regulations will facilitate the transfer of responsibility

for granting permission for forest entrances from local authorities to the Department under the Forest Consent System. It is expected that these changes will reduce the administrative burden on applicants and foresters alike when it comes to submitting an application under the forest roads scheme.

Afforestation Programme

442. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to fund the establishment of a national network of forest producer groups; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43930/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Forestry Programme 2014-2020 includes a specific measure to fund the establishment of new producer groups for private forest owners. Applicants would need to submit a detailed business plan providing a description of the project, including objectives, timelines and projected expenditure. So far the Department has received no applications under this measure; however my Department is aware of a single application that might materialise in 2018. The reason for the poor uptake of this scheme is that there are already in existence 19 producer groups across the country with 960 members (Spring 2017). It may be the case that the existing network is, in the most part, sufficient for the demand that currently exists for this type of local organisation.

Funding available under producer groups could also be made available for amalgamating existing groups where a new group is formed with a new business plan.

Flood Relief Schemes Funding

443. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if funding is available to assist farmers in County Donegal located near a river (details supplied) to clear it in view of the fact their farms were flooding in August 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43933/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Arterial Drainage Acts of 1945 and 1995 provide the Office of Public Works with powers for drainage and improvement of agricultural land and the undertaking of localised flood defence schemes to reduce flood risk in urban areas. The Arterial Drainage Acts and SI 122 of 2010 Regulations also introduced OPW consent requirements for the creation and modification of watercourses, embankments, weirs and bridges. As such, any request for funding to assist in the clearing of the relevant river should be made to the Office of Public Works.

Departmental Staff Recruitment

444. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the publicjobs.ie recruitment campaign for technical agricultural officers; the number of candidates who have been employed nationally; the number of candidates who have been recruited in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43943/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Public Appointments Service (PAS) initiated a Technical Agricultural Officer (TAO) recruitment campaign on behalf of my Department in May 2016. To date, 36 new Technical Agricultural Officers have been recruited to my Department nationally.

Business needs in my Department's offices in Co. Donegal are filled in the first instance through an internal transfer system, whereby serving staff are given the opportunity to transfer to a different work location. Under this system two TAOs will move into offices in Co. Donegal in the coming weeks and arrangements are in train to transfer a further two officers. Two new recruits have been appointed to offices in my Department in Co. Donegal to date.

Question No. 445 withdrawn.

Shared Services

446. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in issuing a P45 for a person (details supplied); if it will be issued as a priority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43984/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Payroll Shared Services Centre (PSSC), which was established in 2013, is part of the Government's National Shared Services Office with overall responsibility for payroll processing functions, including the issuing of P45s to former staff of my Department.

I understand from the PSSC that the delay in issuing the P45 to the individual in question is due to a backlog with the issuing of P45s and I am assured that the P45 will issue to this individual within the next two days.

Agriculture Schemes

447. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the supports and schemes available to a person setting up their own milk processing unit based on local suppliers for tillage and basing their output on nutritional value rather than yield; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44011/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS II) a suite of seven measures are available. Support is available under the following measures:

- Young Farmers Capital Investment Scheme;
- Dairy Equipment Scheme;
- Organic Capital Investment Scheme;
- Animal Welfare, Safety and Nutrient Storage Scheme;
- Low Emission Slurry Spreading;
- Pig and Poultry Capital Investment Scheme;
- Tillage Capital Investment Scheme.

A wide range of investment items are available to help Irish farmers to improve their farms under these measures. Young Farmers can avail of an enhanced grant rate of 60% and for all other farmers the grant rate is 40%.

Tillage Sector

448. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has examined ways to limit reliance on imported genetically modified crops to support tillage farming here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44012/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In Ireland, up to 80% of animal feed for ruminants is provided by grass, hay and silage, complemented where appropriate, by compound feeds. In the case of pigs and poultry, virtually all their nutrition is derived from compound feeds. Ireland imports approx 2.8 million tonnes (2016 figures) of animal feed materials per annum and the total annual usage of feed materials is approx. 4.9 million tonnes. Given our dependence on imported sources and the predominance of GM crops internationally, this has impacted on the volume of GM feed used on Irish Farms. However, significant quantities of non-GM maize and oilseed rape meal are also imported from continental Europe, including Ukraine.

Ireland, due to its high proportion of livestock production compared to tillage area, is especially dependent on feed imports relative to other EU Member States. The pig, poultry and dairy sectors are particularly dependent on imports of GM soybean and GM maize by-products as these are essential ingredients in the formulation of these feed rations.

The European Union is itself only 35% self-sufficient in high-protein supplement supplies for animal feed. Soybean is the most favoured vegetable protein because of its nutritional efficacy and competitive cost. A significant quantity of soybean and maize from North and South America, where GMO cultivation is widespread, is essential therefore to satisfy the protein requirements in animal nutrition within the EU.

My Department supports increased domestic production of native protein crops primarily through the national coupled protein support payment. Since its introduction in 2015, the area of protein crops, mainly beans, has increased from an average of 4,000 ha to 11,000 ha.

Supporting the tillage sector is an important strategic objective of my Department. Through a range of measures including access to low cost finance (SBCI loans), support for investment in efficient mechanisation (TAMS) and favourable tax incentives for land leasing upon which the sector is particularly dependent, have all been introduced to support the sector.

Media Mergers

449. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department's officials have a role in media ownership and diversity policy formation. [43638/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Media Mergers process was created as a result of amendments made to the Competition Act 2002 by the Competition & Consumer Protection Act 2014. All media mergers must be notified to me as Minister, and I must make a determination whether or not the proposed merger may proceed based on an assessment of its impact on the plurality of media in the State.

This process cannot be applied retrospectively and only concerns proposed transactions.

The amendments to the Competition Act also require the BAI to prepare a report every three years which describes the ownership and control arrangements for media businesses in the

State; describes changes to ownership and control arrangements over the previous three years, and analyses the effect of those changes on the plurality of media in the State.

The first such report “Report on Ownership and Control of Media Businesses in Ireland 2012-2014” is available on my Department’s website along with full details of the Media Mergers process.

Separately the Broadcasting Act requires the BAI to ensure the provision of open and pluralistic broadcasting services; to promote diversity in viewpoint, outlet and source, and to promote diversity in control of the more influential commercial and community broadcasting services.

One way in which the BAI achieve these goals is to assess licence applications and proposals for ownership and control changes under the BAI ownership and Control Policy 2012. Further information regarding the work of the Authority can be found on its website.

Climate Change Policy

450. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if provision has been made for expected fines in 2021 owing to Ireland not meeting its EU climate change and carbon emissions reduction targets in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44053/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The 2009 Effort Sharing Decision 406/2009/EC established binding annual greenhouse gas emission targets for EU Member States for the period 2013 - 2020. For the year 2020 itself, the target set for Ireland is that emissions should be 20% below their level in 2005. This will be Ireland’s contribution to the overall EU objective to reduce its emissions by the order of 20% by 2020 compared to 1990 levels. Ireland’s target is jointly the most demanding 2020 reduction target allocated to EU Member States under this Decision, which is shared only with Denmark and Luxembourg.

The latest projections of greenhouse gas emissions by the Environmental Protection Agency indicate that emissions from those sectors of the economy covered by Ireland’s 2020 targets could be between 4% and 6% below 2005 levels by 2020. The projected shortfall to our targets in 2020 reflects both the constrained investment capacity over the past decade due to the economic crisis, and the extremely challenging nature of the target itself. In fact, it is now accepted that Ireland’s 2020 target was not consistent with what would be achievable on an EU wide cost-effective basis.

Notwithstanding this projected shortfall, Ireland’s first statutory National Mitigation Plan, which I published in July of this year, provides a framework to guide investment decisions by Government in domestic measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Plan sets out what Ireland is currently doing, and is planning to do, to further the national transition objective as set out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act, 2015. Although this first Plan will not provide a complete roadmap to achieve the national transition objective to 2050, it begins the process of development of medium- to long-term options to ensure that we are well positioned to take the necessary actions in the next and future decades.

The legislative framework governing the EU’s 2020 emissions reductions targets includes a number of flexibility mechanisms to enable Member States to meet their annual emissions targets, including provisions to bank any excess allowances to future years and to trade allowances between Member States. Using our banked emissions from the period to 2015, Ireland is projected to comply with its emission reduction targets in each of the years 2013 to 2018.

However, our cumulative emissions are expected to exceed targets for 2019 and 2020, which will result in a requirement to purchase additional allowances. While this purchasing requirement is not, at this stage, expected to be significant, further analysis will be required to quantify the likely costs involved, in light of the final amount and price of allowances required. Provision for any expenditure required will be determined in the context of the annual Estimates and Budget process.

Departmental Bodies Data

451. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the State bodies or boards that fall under the remit of his Department; and the number of members of each State body or board who are not qualified within the field in which the board or body has oversight. [43411/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): There are 17 State bodies under the aegis of my Department operating in the commercial, non-commercial and regulatory spheres. The Board members of these bodies are suitably qualified to carry out their roles on the respective Boards.

All appointments to State Boards are made in accordance with the 2014 Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards. A Public Appointments Service (PAS) process has been put in place with the aim of recruiting suitably qualified board members for the positions to which they have been appointed.

The bodies are:

An Post

Bord na Móna

EirGrid

Electricity Supply Board

Raidió Teilifís Éireann

TG4

Digital Hub Development Agency

Environmental Protection Agency

Loughs Agency

Inland Fisheries Ireland

Irish National Petroleum Corporation

Mining Board

National Oil Reserves Agency

Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland

Broadcasting Authority of Ireland

Commission for Communications Regulation

Commission for Regulation of Utilities

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

452. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Ireland is likely to miss its EU 2020 targets to reduce emissions; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that this will have serious implications for Ireland’s 2030 obligations with regard to EU emissions targets; if fines of up to €1.5 billion for every 1% that Ireland is below 2020 renewable energy targets could be issued in this regard; and the measures that he has taken to address this matter. [43435/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Question refers to two different targets, one relating to greenhouse gas emissions reduction and the other to renewable energy.

In relation to the former, the 2009 Effort Sharing Decision 406/2009/EC established binding annual greenhouse gas emissions targets for EU Member States for the period 2013 to 2020. For the year 2020 itself, the target set for Ireland is that emissions should be 20% below their level in 2005. This will be Ireland’s contribution to the overall EU objective to reduce its emissions by the order of 20% by 2020 compared to 1990 levels. Ireland’s target is jointly the most demanding 2020 reduction target allocated to EU Member States under this Decision, which is shared only with Denmark and Luxembourg.

The latest projections of greenhouse gas emissions by the Environmental Protection Agency indicate that emissions from those sectors of the economy covered by Ireland’s 2020 targets could be between 4% and 6% below 2005 levels by 2020. The projected shortfall to our targets in 2020 reflects both the constrained investment capacity over the past decade due to the economic crisis, and the extremely challenging nature of the target itself. In fact, it is now accepted that Ireland’s 2020 target was not consistent with what would be achievable on an EU wide cost-effective basis.

Notwithstanding this projected shortfall, Ireland’s first statutory National Mitigation Plan, which I published in July of this year, provides a framework to guide investment decisions by Government in domestic measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Plan sets out what Ireland is currently doing, and is planning to do, to further the national transition objective as set out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act, 2015. Although this first Plan will not provide a complete roadmap to achieve the national transition objective to 2050, it begins the process of development of medium-to long-term options to ensure that we are well positioned to take the necessary actions in the next and future decades.

The legislative framework governing the EU’s 2020 emissions reductions targets includes a number of flexibility mechanisms to enable Member States to meet their annual emissions targets, including provisions to bank any excess allowances to future years and to trade allowances between Member States. Using our banked emissions from the period to 2015, Ireland is projected to comply with its emissions reduction targets in each of the years 2013 to 2018. However, our cumulative emissions are expected to exceed targets for 2019 and 2020, which will result in a requirement to purchase additional allowances. While this purchasing requirement is not, at this stage, expected to be significant, further analysis will be required to quantify the likely costs involved, in light of the final amount and price of allowances required.

In relation to Ireland’s 2030 obligations, negotiations on a proposal to determine individual

EU Member State targets to contribute to the overall EU commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40% on 1990 levels by 2030 are ongoing. The EU Council of Ministers agreed its General Approach on this proposal on 13 October. I am satisfied that the Council's General Approach provides appropriate recognition of different Member State circumstances and the need to provide flexibility to reduce emissions as cost-effectively as possible in the context of the overall EU target.

With regard to Ireland's renewable energy targets, the EU Renewable Energy Directive 2009/28/EC set Ireland a legally binding target of meeting 16% of our energy demand from renewable sources by 2020. Ireland is committed to achieving this target through meeting 40% of electricity demand, 12% of heat and 10% of transport from renewable sources of energy, with the latter transport target also being legally binding.

While good progress has been made to date, with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) advising that 9.1% of Ireland's overall energy requirements in 2015 were met from renewable sources, meeting the 16% target remains challenging. The SEAI has recently estimated that Ireland could fall short of our renewable energy target by between 1% and 3%. Moreover, in a document entitled *Ireland's Energy Targets - Progress, Ambition and Impacts* (published in April 2016), the SEAI estimated that the cost to Ireland of not meeting our overall renewable energy targets may be in the range of €65 million to €130 million for each percentage point Ireland falls short of the overall 16% renewable energy target.

The Renewable Energy Directive provides a comprehensive framework for Member States to work towards achieving individual and EU renewable energy targets, including mechanisms for countries to work together such as statistical transfers, which allow Member States to meet their targets by purchasing credits from Member States that overachieve on their renewable targets.

The focus remains firmly on meeting our 2020 target and a number of interventions have been taken to support renewable energy, including the Renewable Energy Feed in Tariff supports. New measures are also in development, including a Renewable Electricity Support Scheme and a Renewable Heat Incentive. In any event, the cost of purchasing statistical transfers should any potential shortfall in Ireland's target arise has yet to be established and will depend on a number of factors, particularly the available supply and market costs.

Waste Management

453. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department has examined the effect of six pack plastic can rings on the environment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43503/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Our use of plastic has increased exponentially in recent decades. Plastics feature across a wide range of applications and products, such as packaging, construction, electrics and electronics, agriculture, medical and health. The last waste characterisation study carried out by the EPA showed that 12.4% of our household waste, by weight, was plastic.

The effects of plastic pollution, in particular, on the marine environment has been well publicised. My colleague, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government is responsible for marine environmental policy, including marine litter policy in the first instance. Both he and I recognise that the waste we create on land, and certain plastic waste items, in particular, can represent significant marine litter problems. Accordingly we are working together to iden-

tify measures to address this with our European partners in the context of the forthcoming EU Plastics Strategy.

Other initiatives to combat plastic pollution include the National Litter Pollution Monitoring System (NLPMS) Report, which is commissioned by my Department on an annual basis. It can be downloaded at www.litter.ie. The Reports, over the past decade, demonstrate a generally positive trend with regard to litter. Plastic can rings are not recorded specifically in these local authority NLPMS surveys but they are included with other plastic packaging items. As a percentage of litter monitored, plastic packaging items increased from 6.56% in 2015 to 7.73% in 2016. These increases are of concern to me and in 2017 I have taken further action focussed on the litter issue and have significantly increased funding for the Protecting Upland and Rural Environments programme, the An Taisce National Spring Clean, and the Anti-Litter and Awareness Grant Scheme. My Department also provides funding to the EPA for the commissioning of research and has provided €8.75 million for this purpose in 2017. A number of studies on plastics have been completed through this funding stream.

National Broadband Plan

454. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason for the delay in connecting a person (details supplied) to the fibre to the home broadband network in view of the fact that neighbouring properties in their area have been connected under the same scheme; the stage the installation process is at; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43645/17]

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 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 by individuals seeking information.

- The BLUE areas on the Map represent those areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering, or have indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services,

- The AMBER areas on the Map represent the areas that will require State Intervention and are the subject of a procurement process.

The premises referenced is within the AMBER area and will be covered by the State led Intervention. With regard to the eir planned rural deployment of fibre close to the referenced premises, the decision as to what areas and premises are served is a matter for eir and not one in which I have a role.

With regard to the State led Intervention, my Department is engaged in an on-going procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network for the State led intervention. A significant milestone in that procurement process was reached in September with the submission of "Detailed Solutions" by two bidders. This is the last stage of the procurement process before receipt of final tenders and ultimate progression

to the appointment of a preferred bidder(s).

To improve both mobile and broadband services in rural Ireland in advance of the rollout of the high speed broadband network to be built in the State intervention area, I established, in July 2016, a Taskforce to identify solutions which can be implemented in the short, medium and long term to alleviate mobile phone and broadband coverage deficits, to identify priority areas for rollout and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers. These solutions will enhance the existing services prior to the full build and rollout of the network planned under the NBP State led intervention.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department's website.

Illegal Dumping

455. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated cost of cleaning up illegal dumping in County Wexford; his plans to strengthen sanctions on illegal dumping; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43683/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The cost of illegal dumping is not collated by my Department as it includes local authority enforcement, disposal and legal costs and also involves costs for other State agencies such as An Garda Síochána.

Penalties for serious dumping offences provided for under the Waste Management Acts are already substantial. Persons who are found to be responsible for, or involved in, the unauthorised disposal of waste are liable to a maximum fine of €5,000 on summary conviction and/or imprisonment for up to 12 months, and to a maximum fine of €15 million on conviction on indictment and/or imprisonment for up to 10 years.

My role, as Minister, is to provide the legislative and policy framework under which both local authority and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) enforcement action against illegal dumping is initiated. Enforcement action against illegal waste activity is a matter for the local authorities and the Office of Environmental Enforcement (OEE) of the EPA as appropriate.

Notwithstanding this arrangement, my Department encourages a multi-faceted approach to tackling the problem, incorporating enforcement, public awareness and education and, as such, provides funding to support the activities of a network of local authority waste enforcement officers. In this regard, since the introduction of the local authority waste enforcement grant in 2003, Wexford County Council has received approximately €3.2M.

My Department has also introduced an anti-dumping initiative to work in partnership with local authorities and community organisations in identifying high risk or problem areas, developing appropriate enforcement responses and carrying out clean-up operations. Wexford County Council received funding of €47,000 under the initiative this year to support twelve clean up, monitoring and restorative projects throughout the County. In response to the hugely positive reaction from local authorities and communities since I launched this measure, I will be making a further €1.3M available nationally to support its further development in 2018.

Bord na Móna

456. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the acreage of land under the control of Bord na Móna within the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43777/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Bord na Móna is a commercial State company operating under the Turf Development Acts 1946 to 1998. The matter raised by the Deputy regarding land ownership is operational in nature and not one in which I, as Minister, have any role or function.

Nonetheless, I have forwarded the Deputy's query to Bord na Móna and asked that they respond to the directly to the Deputy on the matter.

National Broadband Plan

457. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a school (details supplied) in County Meath will be included in the roll-out of broadband in the area. [43819/17]

459. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when broadband will be available to residents in Balgeeth, Garristown, County Meath. [43935/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I propose to take Questions Nos. 457 and 459 together.

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 under the National Broadband Plan (NBP). 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.

Individuals can access the High Speed Broadband Map www.broadband.gov.ie using their eircode to ascertain the colour code (BLUE for commercial or AMBER for the State Led Intervention) status for their premises.

There are over 83,000 premises in County Meath, 64,000 of which fall within a BLUE area of the Map and will be covered by commercial operators. Of these 64,000, over 10,000 form part of eir's planned deployment to deliver rural high speed broadband to 300,000 premises between now and the end of 2018. The remaining 19,000 premises in County Meath fall within an AMBER area and will be part of the State led Intervention under the National Broadband Plan.

The position in relation to the particular Meath areas referred to by the Deputy is as follows:

- The map shows that the townland of Culmullin, Co. Meath comprises 31 premises and broadband coverage will be realised through a mix of commercial investment and through the State Intervention under the NBP. Of the 31 premises, 28 premises fall within the State Inter-

vention area including Culmullin National School. The remaining 3 premises are part of eir's planned rural deployment.

- The map shows that the townland of Balgeeth Co. Meath comprises 36 premises. Of the 36 premises, 25 premises fall within the State Intervention area. The remaining 11 premises are part of eir's planned rural deployment.

Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available from eir at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>. Individuals can access this website to determine the connectivity availability status for their premises using their eircode. The website also provides a list of retail service providers who offer services using high speed fibre network in the area.

With regard to the State led Intervention, my Department is engaged in an on-going procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll out a new high speed broadband network. A significant milestone in that procurement process was reached last month with the submission of "Detailed Solutions" by two bidders. This is the last stage of the procurement process before receipt of final tenders and ultimate progression to the appointment of a preferred bidder(s). My Department will engage with the winning bidder(s) on the best rollout strategy for the network build on conclusion of this process.

To improve both mobile and broadband services in rural Ireland in advance of the rollout of the high speed broadband network to be built in the State intervention area, I established, in July 2016, a Taskforce to identify solutions which can be implemented in the short, medium and long term to alleviate mobile phone and broadband coverage deficits, to identify priority areas for rollout and investigate how better services could be provided to consumers. These solutions will enhance the existing services prior to the full build and roll-out of the network planned under the NBP State led intervention.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department's website.

National Broadband Plan

458. **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. [43853/17]

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 and address.

- 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.

Individuals can access the High Speed Broadband Map www.broadband.gov.ie using their eircode to ascertain the colour code (BLUE for commercial or AMBER for the State Led Intervention) status for their premises.

The map shows that the Derrinturn, Co. Kildare is in a BLUE area, where commercial operators are currently delivering or have indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services. Where a citizen living in a Blue area is unable to obtain a high speed broadband service, I would encourage them to email my Department at broadband@dcaae.gov.ie with their eircode and details of the service providers they have contacted.

Question No. 459 answered with Question No. 457.

Electricity Generation

460. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the current and planned measures his Department is undertaking to allow private persons and small-scale businesses to sell electricity they have generated into the national grid. [43963/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): My Department is currently developing a new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) which will be designed to assist Ireland in meeting its renewable energy contribution to EU-wide targets out to 2030. The new RESS will provide pathways for delivering on the 2015 Energy White Paper commitment to ensure communities and citizens are at the centre of the future energy transition in Ireland. Communities are effectively being designed into the fabric of the new scheme and a comprehensive assessment of policies and support measures to increase community ownership from renewable electricity projects has been undertaken. The most effective policies to increase community ownership and participation in renewable electricity projects have been assessed and examined within an Irish context.

Examples of some of these policies include a mandatory requirement for all renewable electricity projects seeking financial support through the new scheme to offer investment and/or ownership opportunities to the local community; the facilitation of grid access for community-led projects; a ring fencing of capacity (MW) for community-led projects; and the establishment of a national community benefits register. Opportunities for smaller scale projects under a variety of local ownership models to get support will also be provided. Furthermore, the Scheme will establish a network of trusted intermediaries who will act as independent facilitators between communities and developers to support community participation in renewable energy projects.

Micro generation, which typically involves an element of self-consumption and the selling of excess electricity to the grid, was also appraised as part of the RESS economic assessment. The analysis identified a number of challenges that may need to be addressed before a support scheme for micro generation can be developed. These include amongst others, a reform of network charges, an assessment of the distributional impact of such a policy decision on the PSO (cost burden sharing), and development of a fair tariff for exported electricity taking the benefits of self-consumption into account. This approach is in line with experience from other EU member states who have attempted to introduce supports for micro generation.

I am committed to further exploring opportunities for supporting micro generation, as I believe that micro-generation will have an important role in Ireland's transition to a carbon

free economy, in assisting Ireland meet its renewable electricity targets, and increasing social acceptance of and promoting renewable energy projects right across the country. I have asked the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), on behalf of my Department to facilitate a workshop on micro generation, and this will take place this week. All relevant stakeholders have been invited to participate with the end goal being the development of a policy position on how best to support micro generation in Ireland.

A public consultation on the design principles of the proposed new RESS was launched on 4 September and submissions are invited from the public. All submissions will be considered and following on from this final public consultation, a design proposal will be brought to Government for approval. Full details of the consultation are available on my Department's website at: www.dccae.gov.ie.

Disabled Parking Permits

461. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether an organisation (details supplied) is randomly selecting elderly persons as part of the selection for renewal of disabled parking permits; if he will raise the matter with the organisation in an effort to stop same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43376/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Irish Wheelchair Association issues Disabled Parking Permits on behalf of my Department. All permits are required under legislation to be renewed every two years. As part of the renewal process, permit holders are required to complete an application form which is forwarded approximately four weeks before the expiry date on their current permit.

As part of the renewal process, ten percent of permit holders are randomly selected to have their GP complete the medical section of the application. This is the same criteria that applicants are required to have completed by their GP when applying for the first time for a permit. Frequently as a result of this process, applicants at renewal stage are found to no longer qualify for the permit. The remaining 90 percent of renewals are not required to get a medical sign off.

Permit holders who have a Primary Medical Certificate and who have a permanent visual impairment are excluded from being randomly selected. There is no criteria in the random selection process that relates to age, gender or disability.

Rail Network

462. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the estimated cost of upgrading signalling centres on the rail network; his plans to replace signalling centres in 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43389/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Iarnród Éireann has responsibility for the maintenance and operation of the heavy rail network. My Department provides capital funding to Iarnród Éireann for the maintenance and renewal of the network under the Infrastructure Manager Multi-Annual Contract (IMMAC), in accordance with the requirements of EU law. The company also receives capital funding, via the National Transport Authority, for heavy rail projects in the Greater Dublin Area and under the Regional Cities Programme.

I have forwarded your question to Iarnród Éireann for direct reply in relation to details of

the expenditure requested by the Deputy. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

State Bodies Data

463. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the State bodies or boards that fall under the remit of his Department; and the number of members of each State body or board who are not qualified within the field in which the board or body has oversight. [43422/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Details of the membership of the Boards of State Bodies within the remit of my Department are listed on my Department's website at the following link: State Boards.

Board members are appointed on the basis of their suitability to contribute to the good governance of the bodies concerned - this does not necessarily correlate to having a specific qualification in relation to the field in which the board or body has oversight.

Rural Transport Programme

464. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the detail of the expansion and amalgamation of services of the rural transport programme; the funding increases and other changes that are due to take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43430/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In Budget 2018 I secured an additional €500,000 in funding for the Rural Transport Programme (RTP). This brings the total funding to €14.9 million and builds on the increased funding in the last two years, which enabled the improvement of existing services and development of new routes.

This funding is provided to the National Transport Authority (NTA) which has national responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including management of the RTP. In light of the NTA's responsibilities regarding the development of services under the RTP, 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.

Road Safety Data

465. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 527 of 3 October 2017, if he will provide the information received from European countries with the safest road safety record in Europe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43438/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The information on safety equipment in other countries was compiled for my Department by the Road Safety Authority (RSA).

The RSA compiled the information from data obtained from the European Commission, and also sent questionnaires directly to 139 contacts registered with International Road Traffic and Accident Database Analysis Group (IRTAD). A total of 23 direct responses were received.

The information was collated and provided to me in tabular form which I am providing here.

As the Deputy will be aware, the five safest European countries in relation to road deaths are Norway, Sweden, the UK, Switzerland and Denmark.

Country	Hi Viz Vest	Warning triangle	First aid kit	Fire extinguisher	Torch	Other required or recommended
Australia	No	HGV over 12 tonne required to carry 3 portable warning triangles	No	No	No	Varies by state. Recommended High visibility vest & first aid kit.
Belgium	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	
Brazil	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Cambodia	No	Yes for all motor vehicles	For passenger vehicles only e.g. buses		No	Sometimes recommended by certain transport associations.
Chile	No	Yes	Only for freight vehicles, public transportation and school buses.	Fire sprinklers (all vehicles)		Conaset recommends the use of High Vis Vest.
Czech Republic	Yes	Yes	Yes	Buses only	No	Spare fuses & Bulbs, Spare wheel, hand jack, spanner for wheels. (for all cars and lorries) Hig vis vest, first aid kit and spare fuses (motor-cycles)
Finland	No	Yes	Buses	Buses and recreational vehicles with gas bottles.		Pedestrians must wear a reflector when it is dark. First aid kits recommended in all vehicles and as a gift for 1st driving licence

Questions - Written Answers

Country	Hi Viz Vest	Warning triangle	First aid kit	Fire extinguisher	Torch	Other required or recommended
France	Yes	Yes	Yes for vehicles used for Professional purposes		No	2 Breathalysers
Greece	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Hungary	Recommended but is compulsory to wear outside built up areas if you step out of car on the motorway	Yes	Is compulsory but due to recent amendments of legislation it's not punished. However in case of an accident the passer-by is obliged to help an injured person and if this is impossible due to missing first aid kit the driver can be fined.	For vehicles over 3.5 and those allowed to tow trailer of 3.5		As for fire extinguisher 2 wheel chocks
Israel	Yes	Yes	Yes for vehicles transporting goods/ people- Taxi, caravans, security vehicles, buses	fire extinguisher – vans, busses; fire resistant blanket – vans, busses	No	

Country	Hi Viz Vest	Warning triangle	First aid kit	Fire extinguisher	Torch	Other required or recommended
Italy	Yes	No	Fleet vehicles			When using a warning triangle it is compulsory to use retro reflective devices or high vis vest. Snow chains/ winter tyres must be carried in winter on selected roads.
Lithuania	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	no	
Poland		Yes	Buses, taxi, driving school & exam cars only	Yes (2 in buses)	No	
Serbian	Yes	Yes	Yes	Vehicles over 3.5 t and buses. Commercial vehicles.	No	2 pcs of wheel chocks legally compulsory for vehicles over 3.5 t and buses.
Sweden	No	Yes	No	Buses only	No	
Switzerland	No	Yes for all vehicles wider than 1 meter except motorcycles, m/c with side car and crawler vehicles.	Coaches		No	

Country	Hi Viz Vest	Warning triangle	First aid kit	Fire extinguisher	Torch	Other required or recommended
Argentina	No	Yes	No	Yes(with load control and reachable for driver)	No	First aid kit officially recommended
Bulgaria	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Cyprus		Yes				
Denmark		Yes				
Estonia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Germany	YES	Yes	Yes	No		

Questions - Written Answers

Country	Hi Viz Vest	Warning triangle	First aid kit	Fire extinguisher	Torch	Other required or recommended
Iceland		Yes	Modified vehicles buses & Coaches	Mobile homes, modified vehicles, buses & Coaches		
Latvia		Yes	Yes	Yes		
Lux	Yes	Yes				
Malta						
Netherlands		Yes	Recommended			
Norway	Yes	Yes				
Nz	No	No	No	No	No	Safety triangle recommended. High viz mentioned in relation to cyclists and motorcyclists
Portugal	Yes	Yes				
Romania		Yes	Yes	Yes		
Slovakia	Yes	Yes	Yes			
Slovenia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Truck and Buses	No	Spare bulb. From nov to march winter equip compulsory. Spare tyre or run flat or tyre repair kit (not for single track vehicles)
Spain	Yes	Yes 2 required				
UK		No legal requirement but should not be used on motorways for safety reasons	Buses and taxis	Buses and taxis		

Country	Hi Viz Vest	Warning triangle	First aid kit	Fire extinguisher	Torch	Other required or recommended
USA	No	Buses & Trucks	No	No	No	Other safety devices are required in trucks and buses no response as to what the actual devices are.

** Enforced with penalties:

Members were asked 'Is this enforceable by the police 'yes or no'. Therefore when reading response, yes means it is enforced by the police.

Road Safety Strategy

466. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on a report (details supplied) submitted to his Department in September 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43439/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I note that the report the Deputy refers to was compiled by a company called C-US Safety Ltd, which was dissolved in 2016. It would be inappropriate for me to specifically comment on or endorse a commercial product.

Notwithstanding this, my Department is currently working on Action 105 of the Road Safety Strategy, which relates to emergency equipment in cars, with the emergency triangle and high-visibility vests emerging as the most viable options.

However, a number of concerns remain to be addressed before emergency packs can be made mandatory, including legislation required to underpin the requirement, penalties for non-carrying of mandatory items, and enforcement issues.

I expect to have this action completed in the coming months.

Sports Capital Programme

467. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he will announce the 2017 sports capital grant allocations. [43453/17]

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. When the programme was launched, it was envisaged that €30m would be available which would have made the allocation of grants particularly challenging. Following the conclusion of the budget discussions and in order to allow as many worthwhile projects as possible to receive some funding, I am pleased that significant extra resources have been secured to allocate under this round. The assessment of all the 2,320 applications is now nearing completion and I expect to be in a position to announce full details of the allocations in the coming weeks.

Vehicle Clamping

468. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the regulations being introduced under the Vehicle Clamping Act 2015; the degree to which these regulations differ from existing custom and practice; if the regulations cover the need to clear and prominent signage; if the appeals process has been improved; if the maximum clamp release fee has been reduced; if a copy of the regulations can be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43491/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Vehicle Clamping Act 2015 (Commencement) Order 2017 (SI Number 211/2017) provided for the 1st June 2017 and the 1st October 2017 to be the operative dates for the purposes of the Act.

On the 1st June 2017 a certain number of sections of the Act were commenced to allow the NTA commence a public consultation process in relation to draft Regulations relating to clamping, signage and clamp release charges.

The Order stated that all other sections of the Act would be operative from the 1st October 2017.

On October 1st the National Transport Authority (NTA) assumed its responsibilities as the regulator of vehicle clamping activities in both statutory and non-statutory (privately-owned) clamping places throughout the State.

The principal provisions of the Act include the:

- regulation of clamping and related activities;
- establishment of a two-tier appeals process to hear appeals against clamping or relocation;
- provision of appropriate signage in places where clamping is operated;
- setting of maximum clamp release and vehicle relocation charges;
- establishment of a code of practice; and
- provision of necessary enforcement and investigate powers to investigate and prosecute any alleged breaches of regulations made.

As required under the Act the NTA has prescribed €125 as the maximum clamp release fee permitted for non-statutory clamping places.

Under the Act the appeals and complaints procedures came into force on 1st October 2017. From that date the NTA processes all second-stage clamping appeals arising from clamping activities anywhere in the State including such appeals against on-street clamping in Dublin City which were previously administered by Dublin City Council.

The NTA will also prepare a draft code of practice providing practical guidance regarding compliance with the Act and the regulations and establishing standards in relation to the general behaviour, performance of duties and conduct of parking controllers and clamping operators with regard to clamping activities.

The full Vehicle Clamping Act 2015 along with the Vehicle Clamping and Signage Regulations can be viewed on the National Transport Authority website at the following link www.nationaltransport.ie/vehicle-clamping.

Public Transport

469. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to introduce an incentive for persons to use public transport in order to ease traffic congestion in cities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43516/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I have secured increased funding for both public transport services and infrastructure in Budget 2018 which will allow us to address congestion and emerging capacity constraints on our public transport system across our cities.

This includes an 8% increase in funding for PSO services across the bus and rail networks in 2018 to support the delivery of these socially necessary but financially unviable public transport services.

Budget 2018 provided a four-year capital envelope for public transport of over €2.7 billion to 2021 including an investment of over €400 million next year. This substantial multi-annual envelope will allow investment in a number of key programmes to ease congestion in our cities and increase capacity on our public transport network.

Over €770 million will be invested in the BusConnects programme to fundamentally transform Dublin's bus system, so that journeys for bus passengers will be fast, reliable, punctual, convenient and affordable.

Funding of over €110 million will be invested in new urban cycling and walking routes which will provide additional sustainable travel options to complement increased capacity and faster, higher quality public transport in our main cities. In addition, there will be investment in the region of €130 million over the next four years for traffic management, bus priority and other smarter travel projects in our cities.

Over €685 million capital investment will also be provided for additional rail infrastructure between now and 2021 to improve the rail network.

Finally, funding continues to be allocated to the National Transport Authority to promote public transport use and to improve customer experiences through the use of smart technologies. Successful initiatives that have been introduced include the Leap Card, real time passenger information and journey planning apps.

Roads Maintenance Funding

470. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding for road repair works (details supplied) will be assigned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43549/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads (RLR) in Kerry is the statutory responsibility of Kerry County Council, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council'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. In this context no funding application has been received by the Department in relation to Dale Road.

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

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

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

Notwithstanding the above, Kerry County Council has been allocated €1.4m in 2017 towards 3 Specific Improvement projects. It is important to reiterate that the role of Exchequer grants for regional and local roads is to supplement local authorities in their spending in this area and it is open to Kerry County Council to fund work on this road from its own resources.

Driver Licences

471. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will review a matter relating to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43581/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the National Driver Licensing Service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority, and I have no role in individual cases. I have therefore referred the Question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Public Transport Review

472. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a detailed study of the subventions to public transport and public bus services in European cities comparable to Dublin will be carried out. [43648/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I am always cautious about drawing direct comparisons between funding levels of public transport in different countries and cities. There are a whole range of issues which can potentially distort the picture and which must be examined to ensure a like for like comparison is being made. Public transport operations in other European cities will differ substantially depending on a variety of factors such as population density, market structure and transport infrastructure. The OECD has also highlighted a number of potential issues including data availability/comparability.

Nonetheless, in reviewing public transport policy in line with the Programme for Government commitment, my Department intends, in conjunction with the National Transport Authority, to again look at possible international comparators relating to the funding of public transport.

As part of the spending review 2017 the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform produced a paper entitled Public Service Obligation (PSO) Funding for Public Transport which provides an overview analysis of State funding of public transport. That paper is available at <http://www.per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/PSO-Transport-2.pdf>.

Ports Facilities

473. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the traffic volumes (details supplied) at Rosslare Europort in each of the years 2013 to 2016, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43662/17]

474. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the financial performance of Rosslare Europort (details supplied) at the port in each of the years 2013 to 2016, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43663/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 473 and 474 together.

The Deputy is aware that Rosslare Europort is unique among the State owned ports as it is not a company operating under the Harbours Acts, but is instead operated as a division of Iarnród Éireann.

I have therefore forwarded the Deputy's questions to Iarnród Éireann for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Road Network

475. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding upgrading the N24 Limerick to Waterford road to motorway standard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43681/17]

476. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he will take to examine road connectivity between Rosslare Europort and the west of the country; his plans to link the M11, N24, M3, M4 and M7 in view of the importance in increasing direct accessibility between the west and continental Europe, avoiding likely UK customs delays post Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43685/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 475 and 476 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 1993-2015 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 Network

477. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to link the M11, N24, M3, M4 and M7 in view of the importance in increasing direct accessibility between the west and north west of Ireland and continental Europe, particularly when taking into account the likely UK customs delays post-Brexit; the steps he is taking to examine road connectivity between Rosslare Europort and the west of the country; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [43688/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 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 Network

478. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he will take to examine road connectivity between Rosslare Europort and the west of the country; his plans to link the M11, N24, M3, M4 and M7 in view of the importance in increasing direct accessibility between the west and continental Europe, avoiding likely UK customs delays post-Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43689/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 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 Network

479. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he will take to examine road connectivity between Rosslare Europort through the south midlands, midlands and the west of the country; his plans to link the M11, N24, M3, M4 and M7 in view of the importance in increasing direct accessibility with continental Europe, avoiding likely UK customs delays post-Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43697/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 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.

Driver Licences

480. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress which has been made to extend the number of jurisdictions with which a reciprocal agreement is in place for the purpose of driving licence exchange; if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties which are being faced by emigrants returning home from countries with which no such mutual agreement exists but where they hold a valid driving licence as issued by the competent licensing authority in the relevant jurisdiction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43746/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Ireland has driver licence exchange with all other EU Member States as a part of EU law, and in addition has bilateral agreements with a number of other jurisdictions. The list of jurisdictions with which we have bilateral agreements is available on the website of the Road Safety Authority (RSA).

In August, I signed into effect the most recent agreement, which is with British Columbia. This represents the fourth Canadian province with which we have such an agreement, and these four provinces represent over half of the Canadian population.

It is important to understand that driver licensing exists in the interests of public safety. We test drivers to a high standard to ensure, insofar as we can, that they are fit to drive safely on our roads. When an agreement with another jurisdiction is proposed, the RSA and the licensing authorities in the other jurisdiction must compare the two systems so that each side may be satisfied that the two regimes apply comparable standards. We cannot make agreements with particular jurisdictions because it may be convenient, at the expense of safety.

Where there are no such agreements in place, drivers taking up residence here must pass through the Irish learner system. I recognise that this creates a burden in terms of time, cost, and inconvenience. My officials have been in discussion with the Minister for the Diaspora on how we can reduce this burden.

The major source of both time and cost is that people in this situation are currently required to undergo the 12-lesson 'Essential Driver Training' programme before taking the driving test. I believe that this burden can be significantly reduced, and my officials are currently discussing details of how to do so with the RSA with a view to having a shorter programme in place early next year.

Local Authority Staff Recruitment

481. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the positions of safety officer and safety adviser have been filled by Cork County Council in relation to the clearance of the route for the proposed N22, Macroom bypass presently being undertaken by a contractor for Cork County Council; the names of the persons appointed to those positions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43808/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the relevant local authority - in this case Cork County Council.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please

advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Bus Éireann Services

482. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the schedule and destination points of the 109 Bus Éireann route will be reviewed; if reverting to the previous schedule and route will be considered; if he will address a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43817/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA), in conjunction with Bus Éireann, 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 Improvement Schemes

483. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when funding will be allocated to a road (details supplied) in east County Galway. [43820/17]

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

As regards speed limits, the application of Special Speed Limits, i.e. speed limits other than the default speed limits, are provided for in Section 9 of the Road Traffic Act 2004, which gives local authorities the power to make bye-laws ("special speed limit bye-laws") in respect of any specified public road or specified part of a public road or specified carriageway or lane of a public road within its administrative area. Under the Act, local authorities are required to give notice to and consider representations from, any borough or town in the administrative county concerned and also the Garda Commissioner. The public must be informed by way of Press Notice in at least two daily newspapers.

It is also open to the Council to draw up a scheme to improve safety at this location and to seek funding for such a scheme in its application to the Department for Safety Improvement Works for 2018.

Railway Stations

484. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the provision of a new train station at Pelletstown; if delays in the provision of funding could see planning permission for the station expire; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43848/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Transport Authority (NTA) is responsible for the development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area.

Noting this, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Cycling Facilities Funding

485. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding is being provided for enhancing cycling routes along the Navan road from the Ashtown roundabout to the quays; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43850/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As part of the Bus Connects bus network transformation programme, I have secured significant funding to construct a number of high quality Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) schemes across the Greater Dublin Area. One of these schemes, the Blanchardstown-UCD BRT, is planned to run along the Navan Road route corridor between Dublin City and Blanchardstown. The proposed scheme is currently at design stage and the scheme will be developed taking the needs of cyclists, pedestrians and all other road users into account.

I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you as they will be able to provide more detailed information on the current status of the Blanchardstown-UCD BRT proposals. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Road Projects

486. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to the appointment of consultants to oversee the design of the new bridge at Ballina-Killaloe, if the CPOs connected to the project have commenced; the timeframe for the conclusion of the project; his plans to upgrade the Ballina, Birdhill Road and Killaloe bypass as part of this investment. [43858/17]

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

The Shannon Bridge Crossing at Killaloe is one of a number of schemes included in the Capital Plan 2016-2021 designed to address bottlenecks on the road network. The bridge is the 1st phase of the Shannon Crossing/Killaloe Bypass/R494 upgrade scheme. In planning the construction schedule for individual projects included in the Plan, account has to be taken of the annual budgets in the Capital Plan and the need to phase different sections of projects to manage the available budgets.

Following the conclusion of the judicial review relating to the Shannon crossing/Killaloe Bypass/R494 scheme, it is now a matter for the local authority (Clare County Council) to progress the scheme. Clare County Council has been provided with an allocation of €500,000 in 2017.

No decisions have been made as yet in relation to the timing of the construction phases for the Killaloe Bypass/R494 sections of the overall scheme.

Driver Licences

487. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the right to drive D class vehicles will be reinstated in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43874/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The operation of the National Driver Licensing Service is the statutory responsibility of the Road Safety Authority, and I have no role in individual cases. I have therefore referred the Question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

Public Transport

488. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will instruct Irish Rail to provide a motorised buggy service to bring persons with limited mobility from the station hall down the platform at Heuston Station to the trains; if he will fund the provision of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43893/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In Budget 2018 I secured multi-annual funding of almost €30 million over the next four years to continue the programme of retro-fitting older, existing public transport facilities to improve their accessibility features. This effectively doubles the previously planned investment amount.

Allocation of that funding is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA). 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.

Ministerial Meetings

489. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he last formally met with the CEO of Íarnród Éireann; the issues discussed; when the next meeting will take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43912/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I last met with the then Chairman and CEO of Iarnród Éireann on the 28th June 2017 and received an update from them on a range of issues, including the financial position of the company and engagement with the Safety Regulator. I also met with the CEO in Connolly Station on 12th September 2017. I also met with the new Chairman designate on 2nd October last. At that meeting we discussed his impending appointment as Chairman and the challenges and opportunities he envisages in that role.

I meet with the Chairs and CEOs of CIÉ and its subsidiaries on a regular basis, or as the need arises. In addition to these meetings, I am of course briefed by my Department on any relevant issues which arise during the course of normal administrative and corporate governance related contact between my Department and the companies in question.

Tourism Data

490. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the net

worth of tourism to Ireland in economic terms in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43914/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Tourism is a hugely important indigenous sector in the Irish economy and provides employment in all parts of the country. There is no single indicator in the national accounts which determines the net worth of tourism to Ireland in economic terms. Fáilte Ireland do publish a figure for total tourism revenue using data from the CSO and some other sources and this is available on the agency's website. For ease of reference, the overall figure published by Fáilte Ireland is reproduced below but further detail is available from the agency. Equivalent figures for 2017 to date are not available.

Year	Total Tourism Revenue
2016	€8,308m
2015	€7,689m
2014	€6,851m
2013	€6,164m
2012	€5,652m
2011	€5,293m

Tourism Policy

491. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the proportion of the annual tourism budget which is spent on research and development of the tourism product; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43915/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The total budget for tourism in 2017 is almost €122m. This includes funding for our two tourism agencies Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland, the tourism marketing fund and for tourism product development. The capital allocation for tourism product development in 2017 is €12.450m, representing 10.2% of the overall tourism budget. A detailed breakdown of the tourism budget is provided in the 2017 Estimates Volume for the Transport, Tourism and Sport Vote.

I am pleased to have secured an increased capital allocation for tourism product development in the Mid-term review of the Capital Plan, bringing the total available for spending in the four year period from 2018 to 2021 to almost €108 million.

My Department's role in relation to tourism lies in the area of national tourism policy. It is not directly involved in research and development of the tourism product. That is a matter for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland.

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

Tourism Employment Data

492. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons employed directly and indirectly in tourism related industry in each of the years 2011 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43916/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The collection of statistical information, including information relating to employment numbers, is a matter for the Central Statistics Office, the parent Department of which is the Department of An Taoiseach. I have no role of function in the matter of collection and collation of the information sought by the Deputy.

Bus Éireann Services

493. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will clarify reports that Bus Éireann is requiring passengers with disabilities to inform the company by 3 p.m. on the Friday before travel if they wish to travel on Saturday, Sunday or Monday; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43951/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for Bus Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

National Youth Work Advisory Committee

494. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the position regarding the establishment of the national youth work advisory committee; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43407/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Sections 17 and 18 of the Youth Work Act 2001 provide for the appointment of a National Youth Work Advisory Committee. The Committee had an advisory and consultative role to the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs in matters to do with youth work, including the coordination of youth work programmes and services. In line with these provisions, a new National Youth Work Advisory Committee was appointed by the then Minister for Children and Youth Affairs with a term of office of one year with effect from 28 January 2013. The Committee had its final meeting on 26 November 2013. The Committee continued to work with my Department and assisted with the development of the new National Youth Strategy, in particular in identifying in what ways the youth work sector can contribute to shared policy objectives for young people.

The National Youth Strategy 2015-2020 was published in, 2015. The implementation structures established by my Department under Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (BOBF), the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People oversee the roll out of the National Youth Strategy. There is no doubt that the youth work services have a significant contribution to make to realise the goals of the National Youth Strategy as part of a cross sectoral, whole of society approach to supporting young people in their everyday lives. For this reason, the key youth sector interests are represented on the structures established by my Department to support the implementation of Better Outcomes Brighter Futures. At national level, representatives of the voluntary youth services have been appointed to the Advisory Council of BOBF. At local level, youth sector representatives participate in the Children and Young People's Services Committees. Key Government departments and agencies that have an interest in children and young people and that had served on the National Youth Work Advisory Committee are represented on the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium and on the Sponsors Group that have been established under Better Outcomes Brighter Futures to drive the effective implementation of the policy framework.

There have been other significant policy and legislative developments that are relevant to the

provision of youth services and the role of the National Youth Work Advisory Committee since the 2001 Act was passed. These include the introduction of the Education and Training Boards Act 2013 which, inter alia, provides for a statutory function for Education and Training Boards in supporting the provision and assessment of youth work services at local level. The National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making 2015-2020, which was published by my Department in June, 2015 is particularly relevant. I am deeply committed to ensuring that young people are involved in the preparation, planning and implementation of policies that impact on their lives.

In addition, my Department is fully committed to the reform of the many youth funding schemes. The Deputy will be aware that a number of targeted funding schemes supporting youth services were the subject of a Value for Money and Policy Review in 2014. The review made a number of recommendations for the future operation of the youth schemes and their development in the years ahead. Work on the development of a new funding scheme has been prioritised by my Department and consultations with youth services are continuing with a view to introducing the new youth funding programme in line with the review. The Deputy will also be aware that my Department has commenced a review of the Youth Service Grant Scheme. This review is intended to enhance its accountability, transparency and outcome measurement. It is also seeking to determine how best to meet the ever evolving needs of young people.

My Department works closely with the youth work sector, the voluntary youth services, the Education and Training Boards, other government departments and agencies and consults with young people themselves in the development and delivery of policies and services for children and young people.

For the above reasons, it is not my intention to reconvene the National Youth Work Advisory Committee while the reform process is ongoing. However, officials from my Department intend to facilitate a meeting with representatives of the youth sector with a view to agreeing objectives and identifying opportunities where my Department can best engage with the youth sector to ensure the best possible outcomes for young people. Given the seismic changes which have occurred over the past sixteen years, my Department will be revisiting the Youth Work Act, 2001 on the conclusion of the reform process, to ensure that it fully articulates the needs of young people in Ireland.

Departmental Bodies Data

495. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the State bodies or boards that fall under the remit of her Department; and the number of members of each State body or board that are not qualified within the field in which the board or body has oversight. [43410/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can inform the Deputy that the bodies under the aegis of my Department are the Child and Family Agency (Tusla), the Adoption Authority of Ireland (AAI), the Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) and the Oberstown Children Detention School Campus (OCDC). My Department also provides the primary source of funding for Gaisce, the President's Award. Gaisce is a limited company set up under the Companies Acts. All of these bodies except for the Ombudsman for Children's Office have boards. Details of the boards in question are published on the *Stateboards.ie* website.

The members of the Boards are appointed in line with Government Guidelines on Appointment to State Boards and the governing legislation or, in the case of Gaisce, the Memorandum

and Articles of Association of the company. This includes any requirements in relation to professional qualifications. An example of this would be the AAI. The Adoption Act 2010 specifies the professional qualifications required of the members of the board. The Guidelines also involve a process whereby my Department, in consultation with the chair of the board, will identify the relevant qualifications and competencies required for a particular board vacancy or across the composition of the Board. The advertisement and selection process under the Government Guidelines, in conjunction with the Public Appointments Services, ensure that these criteria are met.

Early Childhood Care and Education

496. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that some child care providers are only offering sessional rates for parents in excess of the three hours covered by the new ECCE scheme resulting in higher rates for parents; her plans to provide a solution to this issue in order that parents can afford to cover childcare costs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43485/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The ECCE programme is a three hour educational programme funded by my Department. Any fees for childcare hours over and above the ECCE hours is at the discretion of the service provider. Registered providers may offer an additional 30 minutes per day but this must be offered on an optional basis to parents and uptake of the additional time must not be a condition of initial or continued enrolment in the ECCE programme. A registered provider offering sessional hours only would be found non-compliant with the programme rules when inspected by Pobal.

If a parent requires ECCE only, and is having difficulties finding such a place, their local city/county childcare committee can provide them with assistance.

Child and Family Agency Services

497. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the capacity of a centre (details supplied). [43517/17]

498. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children currently placed in a centre (details supplied) on foot of a secure care order. [43518/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 497 and 498 together.

I have been advised by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, that the centre referred to has the capacity to cater for 10 children. Currently, there are 5 young people placed in the centre on foot of a secure care order.

Community Childcare Subvention Programme

499. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will review a matter (details supplied); if she will address the concerns of the person; the steps she is taking to assist on these issues; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43550/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Over the course

of the past year and beyond, my Department has been working to build a childcare system that is based on principles of affordability, accessibility and quality.

The increase in supports I have provided for the 2017/18 Programme year represents a major step towards accessible, affordable, quality childcare after decades of neglect and under-investment by successive Governments.

There are two supports being rolled out under the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS and CCSP) Schemes. These include universal (non means tested supports) of up to €1,040 per year, and enhanced supports of up to €7,500 to assist families to return to work and training. All of the supports are equally accessible between community and private providers.

The specific rules around the CCS schemes including eligibility has been constructed and layered to ensure that those most in need receive the highest level of subvention.

My Department received a high volume of calls from parents looking to know where they could access the new universal subsidy. A list of services that have signed the CCSP contract (which enables access to the universal subsidy) was added to the website for the convenience of parents and support agencies. It was decided that to include all of the schemes to the list would confuse matters when the majority of the traffic to the site and queries related to the universal subsidy.

I recognise the pressures on childcare providers and I have provided €3.5 million towards ‘non contact time’ for all childcare providers who register for the enhanced childcare measures. This, in addition to the €14.5 million that has been already paid to childcare services so far in 2017 in recognition of the administration associated with ECCE and other schemes.

My Department has also worked to enhance access to the schemes by changing the former CCS Private Scheme to the expanded CCS Plus Scheme through which community providers can opt to register children for holiday periods and children for the universal scheme.

My Department is also working to streamline the registration process in consultation with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

I am committed to ensuring that our childcare subvention schemes meet the needs of children, parents and providers. My Department will continue to review the CCS scheme and ensure that the rules are clear and well communicated. I will take on board the detailed comments set out in correspondence and my officials will consider the issues raised and will respond in more detail to each issue raised.

Child and Family Agency Services

500. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans for a protocol for Tusla to follow relative to its communication with its clients, foster families and so on; if the organisation can provide an efficient response to those that contact it and persons and families that deal regularly with its staff and social workers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43586/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I thank the Deputy for raising this matter. I take it from the Deputy’s question that he is seeking further clarification relating to Tusla’s communications practice and protocol, as it relates to contact with clients and other parties. The Deputy recently tabled a similar question relating to Tusla’s complaints handling mechanism, and I set out in some detail the approach which Tusla is taking

in this area.

Tusla is committed to following the twelve principles of Quality Customer Service, adopted by Government in the Irish Public Service Modernisation Programme, by developing and implementing best practice models of customer care, and promoting service user involvement throughout the Agency. This concept is used as a guide in Tusla's "Tell Us: You Say, We Listen" complaints policy.

All policies developed by Tusla contain key messages for staff on how to interact with children and young people, and their families, in line with Tusla's core values of respect, trust and empathy. Policies also provide guidance on when communication needs to take place and, in some instances, specific time frames are set out.

Tusla has recently appointed a new Head of Communications with responsibility for Tusla's corporate communications strategy. In the interim, a number of measures have been put in place to effect more proactive internal engagement and engagement with external stakeholders, such as foster parents. The new strategy, when fully developed, will include an External Communications Plan and a Stakeholder Engagement Plan.

Tusla aims to provide all children and families with a timely, proportionate and appropriate response to their queries. If the Deputy has a specific issue on which he would like clarification, I would be happy to take this up with Tusla on his behalf.

Child and Family Agency Services

501. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the operational status in relation to a child and adolescent residential facility (details supplied) in County Donegal; if the unit remains closed; when it is expected to reopen to service users; if the centre will continue to operate as a residential facility going forward; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43598/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I have been advised by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, that at this time, the centre concerned is not being used as a residential childcare facility. The purpose and function of this centre is currently under review with the relevant stakeholders.

Departmental Agencies Staff Recruitment

502. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the appointment of members to fill the vacancies on the council of Gaisce, the President's award, in view of the fact that the original advertisement stated that three of the seven vacant positions were only until February 2018; if this is still the case in view of the fact that the positions are still vacant; if all positions will be for a three year term; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43617/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that all successful candidates were written to last week.

Child Care Services

503. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to initiate a national discussion on a long-term strategy to transform the childcare sector into a public service. [43647/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): There are presently no specific plans to initiate a national long term consultation process on the future service delivery model for the early years sector in this country. However, a number of fundamental developments are taking place which are critical to the future of childcare.

My Department is currently in the process of preparing Ireland's first dedicated Early Years Strategy, as committed to in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures. My officials are also preparing a tender document to commission a review of the structural elements of the early years sector at national level.

My Department recently commissioned Crowe Howarth to conduct an independent review of the cost of delivering high quality childcare in Ireland.

The Programme for Government contains 14 commitments relating to high quality and affordable childcare. Over the last three budgets we have increased funding in childcare by 87%. Notwithstanding this, Ireland remains one of the most expensive countries in the OECD for childcare and clearly more investment and planning is required.

National Lottery Funding Disbursement

504. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount of funding per annum a charity (details supplied) received for 2016 or the nearest available year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43660/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department operated a discretionary National Lottery Funding Scheme some years ago in which grants were allocated to community groups and programmes to support children, young people and families. The scheme closed in 2014. The organisation in question last received a sum of €7,000 from my Department in 2013 to provide training resources for child contact centres.

The child contact centres were set up under a pilot project operated by Barnardos and One Family from October 2011 to December 2013. I have made contact with the Minister for Justice and Equality regarding the final evaluation report of the pilot project, suggesting that our two Departments would jointly review the evaluation report in light of changing infrastructural arrangements such as the establishment of the Child and Family Agency and the proposed Family Courts Service, and consider its recommendations accordingly.

Child and Family Agency Expenditure

505. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 197 of 21 September 2017, the proportion of the €14,569,718.70 expenditure on legal fees by Tusla in 2016 which was spent on external legal counsel; the firms employed by Tusla to provide same; and the total value of fees that accrued to each firm. [43684/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As indicated to the Deputy previously, expenditure by Tusla on legal matters is not a direct financial transaction of my Department and as such the Department does not routinely hold information in respect

of individual legal costs incurred by the agency. In the circumstances I am requesting Tusla to contact the Deputy directly in relation to the matter she has raised.

Affordable Childcare Scheme Eligibility

506. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if flexibility will be given in circumstances in which a family have a child in a creche and it has signed up to the affordable child scheme and the parent works flexible days three days one week and two days the second week but the provider does not allow flexible options and will allow the child sign up for the scheme for only two days each week hence the family losing out; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43725/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Childcare provisions in my Department operate to support parents to access employment and to meet the needs and well-being of children. It is considered to be in the best interests of children to have regular and consistent patterns of childcare and our systems are set up with this in mind.

In certain exceptional circumstances, we do allow for unusual arrangements, but as currently constructed we cannot facilitate all possible permutations of childcare. Our system operates on the basis of fixed weekly patterns. This may be something that my Department can review for future programme cycles as unfortunately, it is not possible to make major system changes after the operational commencement of a childcare programme.

Youth Services Funding

507. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will increase funding to an organisation (details supplied) which saw a funding reduction of 20% from 2010 to 2017 while at the same time the organisation grew by 35%; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43760/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In 2017, funding of €57.4m has been provided to my Department for various youth schemes, an increase of €5.5m over 2016. The additional funding is being used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services. My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. These schemes include the Youth Service Grant Scheme, amounting to €10.65m in 2017, under which funding is made available on an annual basis to thirty national and major regional youth organisations. This funding is intended to ensure the emergence, promotion, growth and development of youth organisations with distinctive philosophies and programmes aimed at the social education of young people.

Scouting Ireland receives grant aid on an annual basis under the Youth Service Grant Scheme. In 2017, €876,337 was allocated to the organisation under the Scheme, a 5% increase over the 2016 allocation.

Over the past few years, Scouting Ireland has received significant funding outside of the Youth Service Grant Scheme. The organisation was allocated €150,000 in current funding in 2015 and a further €200,000 in Dormant Accounts funding in 2016 to support the Operation Lelievlet youth employment initiative. It received €49,630 under the capital funding scheme for youth projects and services in 2016 to fund the improvement of disability access and secu-

rity at Scouting Ireland. In 2015 €30,000 was also provided to the organisation to assist it with its budget sustainability to the year end.

In addition to the grant funding provided to Scouting Ireland in 2017 an additional application for funding has been received for funding for its AcadaMoot Programme and this application is currently under consideration within my Department.

Family Resource Centres

508. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to the announcement in budget 2018 of €40 million additional funding for Tusla, the amount the additional funding to be allocated to family resource centres; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43761/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, will receive an additional €40.6 million in funding next year. This will bring Tusla's allocation to over €753 million in 2018.

Arising from Budget 2018, I will shortly be issuing Tusla with its 2018 Performance Statement in line with the provisions of the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013. Tusla will, in response to the Performance Statement, prepare a Business Plan for 2018 which will be submitted to me for consideration.

The precise level of funding to be allocated to the Family Resource Centre Programme will be considered by Tusla, in preparing its Business Plan, having regard to the overall level of funding available in 2018, which will exceed €753 million.

It is not my intention to prescribe the overall level of funding to be allocated by Tusla to the Family Resource Centre Programme. It is more appropriate, in my view, that Tusla first sets out its proposals for this important service area, having regard to its statutory remit and taking account of the totality of funding available next year.

However, I can confirm that there will be a significant increase in funding for the Programme within the overall increase of over €40 million, including the addition of 11 Family Resource Centres to the Programme. There will be also be increased funding to support the existing Family Resource Centres across the country.

I very much appreciate the role that Family Resource Centres play in offering early intervention support to vulnerable children and families in demographically diverse communities around the country. I am pleased to be in a position to support the work of centres through the targeting of additional resources to services that will impact positively on vulnerable children and families.

Question No. 509 answered with Question No. 63.

Question No. 510 answered with Question No. 52.

Question No. 511 answered with Question No. 37.

Question No. 512 answered with Question No. 48.

Question No. 513 answered with Question No. 57.

Affordable Childcare Scheme Implementation

514. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the takeup of the affordable childcare scheme rolled out in September 2017 by area and cost of subsidies; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43797/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am committed to ensuring that childcare is affordable, accessible and of a high quality.

The increase in supports I have provided for the 2017/2018 programme year represents a major step towards accessible, affordable, quality childcare after decades of neglect and underinvestment by successive Governments. There are two supports being rolled out under the Community Childcare Scheme. These include universal (non means tested supports) of up to €1,040 per year, and enhanced supports of up to €7,500 targeted to assist families to return to work and training.

So far in 2017/2018 the number of registrations submitted by service providers is as follows:

- targeted schemes (CCS, CCSP and TEC): 25,775 children
- The universal scheme (CCSU): 25,339 children

It should be noted that for most of the programmes, providers can continue to register children throughout the year and children may enter the programmes at different times. My Department projects that almost 60,000 children will avail of the targeted and universal schemes (excluding ECCE).

The number of service providers that have signed up to deliver the affordable childcare scheme, which includes the universal element, is 3,199.

This represents an investment of €40.3m from September to December 2017 and €92m for the full year 2018.

I would also note that 86,711 children have signed up so far to the free preschool scheme (ECCE) for this programme year, 2017/18. There are three cumulative registration cycles for ECCE and this intake is only the first cycle. In 2016/2017 over 120,000 children registered for ECCE.

Child Care Services Funding

515. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she will report on the €35 million allocated to her Department for childcare schemes in budget 2017; the schemes it funded; if she will provide a breakdown of funding for the different schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43798/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): In Budget 2017 I was pleased to secure a gross funding allocation for my Department of €1,286 million, representing an increase of €172 million on 2016.

€466 million in 2017 has been allocated to Childcare. The primary components of this spend are capitation for the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE) at €278 million, capitation for the targeted schemes including the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCS) and the Training and Employment Childcare Programmes (TEC) at €92 million

and funding for the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) at €32 million. The remainder of the funding has been assigned to administration costs in respect of these schemes, in addition to providing for a range of capital and programme support measures. This level of funding represents a significant investment in the childcare sector, and is intended to facilitate the continuing development of quality, affordable and accessible childcare.

As the year progresses my Department will continue to manage expenditure within the allocation agreed by the Dáil in the 2017 Estimates in order to deliver my Department's agreed objectives.

Child and Family Agency Investigations

516. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 183 of 27 September 2017, if further information has been received by Tusla; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43832/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am aware that the Deputy provided more information to allow Tusla, the Child and Family Agency to examine the issues concerned. I am advised that the information was not sufficient enough to allow the report to be sourced. Therefore, in order to facilitate further searches, I would request that the Deputy please provide further detailed information to my Department.

Employment Rights

517. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to introduce a sectoral employment order for workers in the early years preschool sector; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43901/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Government is not an employer of workers in the early years pre-school sector it is very constrained in what it can do in regard to pay and conditions. It does, however, accept that it is a major funder of the childcare sector and, as such, has a role to play. It is important to note that the most important stakeholders in putting agreed pay structures in place in any sector are recognised employers and employee groups.

My Department is aware that trade unions are active in seeking to achieve a critical mass of representation on the employee side and welcomes this move. My Department would also be supportive of any move on the employer side to establish a recognised representative body. In terms of improving pay and conditions I have suggested to the sector that they could apply to the Labour Court for a Sectoral Employment Order (SEO), asking the Court to make a recommendation in relation to pay for the whole early years' sector. Under a SEO process, organisations substantially representative of employers and employees come together to agree a way forward and submissions are sought from key stakeholders.

It should be highlighted that my Department would have no role in relation to the SEO process, however, as a significant funder, and with policy responsibility for quality, my Department would be well placed to make a submission to the Court once it publishes its notice in relation to the matter of the application for a SEO for the sector.

Youth Services Funding

518. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the way in which she plans to spend the additional €1.5 million allocated to the youth services sector in budget 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43954/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work involving approximately 1,400 youth work staff working in youth services and communities throughout the country.

As the Deputy is aware, Budget 2018 has provided an additional €1.5 million in current funding to my Department to support the provision of youth services. This additional funding will be used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people. Following the Budget 2018 announcement, my Department will soon commence a process with national organisations and local services to identify service development needs for 2018 and to agree the 2018 allocations. Every effort will be made to complete this process as soon as possible.

Departmental Correspondence

519. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the position regarding correspondence that was submitted to her Department in July 2017 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43958/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department is working with Pobal and the Chief State Solicitor's Office (CSSO) to establish the current situation and options available to us regarding this matter. In addition to this, the Department is currently engaged in identifying further issues arising from this process, including those relating to the charges placed on the property and associated documentation submitted as of July 2017.

We undertake to work through these issues as quickly as possible. Further, the Department will contact the named service directly to establish a process for future action as soon as is possible.

Youth Services

520. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which her Department continues to directly liaise with youth organisations with particular reference to the identification of issues of concern such as the provision of financial support in circumstances in which it is appropriate; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43998/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department maintains close contact with the national youth organisations and I and officials from my Department meet formally with 30 national youth organisations twice a year to share knowledge and information on developments in the youth sector. My Department will also shortly commence a process with national youth organisations and local services to identify service development needs for 2018. Youth officers of the Education and Training Boards provide an important support role to my Department in the co-ordination and administration of youth services at a local level and keep my Department informed of issues which may require a follow up meeting between officials and youth organisations. Officials from my Department also meet

with youth organisations on an individual basis from time to time when the need arises.

My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work involving approximately 1,400 youth work staff working in youth services and communities throughout the country.

In 2017, €57.4 million has been allocated in current funding to support the provision of youth services. Budget 2017 and 2018 provided a total of €7 million extra funding for youth services. The additional funding is being used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services.

These schemes include the Youth Service Grant Scheme under which funding is made available on an annual basis to thirty national and major regional youth organisations. In 2017, some €10.65 million has been allocated under this scheme, a 5% increase over 2016.

This funding is intended to ensure the emergence, promotion, growth and development of youth organisations with distinctive philosophies and programmes aimed at the social education of young people.

The Local Youth Club Grant Scheme supports youth work activities at a local level. These grants are made available to all youth clubs and groups through the local Education and Training Boards. The scheme is open to some 1,600 youth groups and clubs, with an estimated 89,000 club members around the country. The scheme, which is open to new entrants, is advertised locally and applications for funding are invited by the Education and Training Boards from local groups in their respective areas. Each year, some 600 local youth clubs benefit from the scheme. In 2017, I have provided an additional 10% in funding to the scheme, bringing the total allocation to €1.1715.

In addition, I was pleased to approve the establishment the Local Youth Club Equipment Scheme in 2017 which will provide €6.35 million nationally. The primary focus of this scheme will be to assist volunteer led clubs and groups that work with young people in communities throughout the country. The scheme will allow for the purchase of equipment for sport, arts, adventure and other much needed items.

Youth Services Funding

521. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the amount of funding made available to various youth and youth support organisations in the course of 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43999/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work involving approximately 1,400 youth work staff working in youth services and communities throughout the country.

In 2017, €57.4 million has been allocated in current funding to support the provision of youth services. Budget 2017 and 2018 provided a total of €7 million extra funding for youth services. The additional funding is being used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth

services.

These schemes include the Youth Service Grant Scheme, under which funding is made available on an annual basis to thirty national and major regional youth organisations. Targeted supports for disadvantaged, marginalised and at risk young people are provided through the Special Projects for Youth Scheme, the Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund, Rounds 1 and 2, Local Drugs Task Force Projects and certain other programmes including the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme and Youth Information Centres.

The Local Youth Club Grant Scheme supports youth work activities at a local level. These grants are made available to all youth clubs and groups through the local Education and Training Boards. Each year, in the region of 1700 local youth clubs are eligible to apply under the scheme.

In addition to the above, I was pleased approve the establishment the Local Youth Club Equipment Scheme in 2017. The primary focus of this scheme will be to assist volunteer led clubs and groups that work with young people in communities throughout the country. The scheme will allow for the purchase of equipment for sport, arts, adventure and other much needed items. Some €6.35 million has been made available nationally under this scheme.

Child Safety

522. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of complaints in respect of children at risk received in the relevant sections of her Department in the past 12 months; the degree to which all have been investigated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44000/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department does not collate the number of communications received by the Department in relation to children who may be at risk. Such communications received are referred to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency which has responsibility for investigative processes.

Departmental Staff

523. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which adequate staff remain available to the various sections of her Department with a view to ensuring the smooth and effective operation of all the services for which she is responsible; if particular issues have arisen or are likely to arise in this regard; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44001/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am satisfied that Department is adequately resourced to carry out its functions and services. Since my appointment as Minister, the staffing complement has grown from 181 to 236 people, with a further cohort currently being recruited which will bring the total staffing numbers to around 280 people before end 2018. The increase in staffing numbers reflects the continuing growth in the responsibilities of my Department, whose allocation will grow to €1.38 billion in 2018 following increases in the two Budgets since I took office.

As additional streams of work emerge in my Department, it is inevitable that, from time to time, temporary staffing shortfalls may occur. These are remedied at the earliest opportunity. I am satisfied that the workload required from my Department is adequately resourced and will

continue to be. My Department's objectives continue to be delivered as planned and as scheduled and I anticipate that it will continue to do so.

Departmental Agencies Staff Data

524. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which sufficient and appropriately qualified staff remain available to the various offices under her aegis in view of the various responsibilities for which she is responsible and ever increasing demands; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44002/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy is aware, there are four agencies within my remit and I wish to advise as follows:

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

- To ensure the provision of a high quality service and to meet statutory requirements Tusla depends on having a sufficient number and appropriately trained workforce in place at national, regional and local levels. Tusla Human Resources, through its Workforce and Recruitment work stream, addresses service delivery needs based on the job orders it receives.

Tusla employs approximately 3,615 whole time equivalent (WTE) staff and the vast majority of these are focused on responding to the needs of children and families at risk. I wish to assure the Deputy that I am informed by Tusla that with the current available staff, all urgent and emergency cases are dealt with immediately.

More than 70% of Tusla's workforce are Social Work and Social Care staff. Social Work staff must be professionally registered by CORU who independently verify qualifications and professional standing. Tusla is engaging with key stakeholders to examine issues related to the supply and demand for these key grades and in addition is working to deploy multidisciplinary teams to overcome any difficulties in securing qualified staff while ensure a high quality service is delivered in line with statutory requirements.

I am also informed by Tusla that it is its policy to ensure that all staff are trained in child protection and Children First guidelines and staff attend a broad range of child protection training. Tusla's *Continual Professional Development (CPD) Strategy* also aims to ensure that Tusla staff maintain up-to-date knowledge and skills as a foundation for professional practice. The Strategy supports all Tusla staff, regardless of profession or grade, to engage in CPD activities in order to maintain their standards of proficiency and as a safeguard for service users and the general public, as required for professional registration.

-With regard to the Adoption Authority of Ireland, my Department works with the agency to sanction the recruitment of extra staff required by the Authority to meet its statutory requirements.

-With regard to Oberstown Children Detention Campus, my Department works closely with Oberstown and I am informed by them that there are sufficient and appropriately qualified staff for their areas of responsibility on campus at this time.

As additional streams of work emerge in the agencies, it is inevitable that, from time to time, temporary staffing shortfalls may occur. These are remedied at the earliest opportunity.

Child Safety

525. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which support services are being made available to children who may be at risk as a result of being undocumented non-nationals; the extent to which further measures are planned to protect such children; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44003/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Child Care Act, 1991 applies to all children resident in the State irrespective of their immigration status. Under the Child Care Act, 1991 and the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, Tusla has a duty to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care or protection. The Agency is obliged to provide care for these children for as long as their welfare requires it.

Children First National Guidance (2011) gives advice for notifying Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, of situations where abuse is suspected. A range of professionals including teachers, nurses, early years educators, Gardaí and other health professionals, who see children regularly, are in a good position to identify children at risk. Where someone has reasonable grounds for suspecting a child is being, or has been, abused, they are expected to immediately contact Tusla.

The Children First Act, 2015 places a statutory obligation on key professionals (mandated persons) to report concerns of harm above a defined threshold to Tusla without delay. These provisions will be commenced on 11 December, this year.

If a child is taken into care, their needs are given priority. A social worker is assigned to a child placed in State care and has a duty to prepare and regularly review the care plan for the child. Intrinsic to this process is ensuring that the wishes of the child are listened to, and if appropriate, Tusla may assist them in establishing residency.

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children are placed in care and have their needs assessed, and are allocated a social worker.

As of the end of July, Tusla had received 20 young people under the Calais Special Project. The young people were taken into the care of Tusla, and are receiving dedicated support and services, including medical and educational supports. Before travelling to Ireland, these young people were screened by the Gardaí and Department of Justice officials, and their residency status was approved.

Children who, with their parents, live in Direct Provision, are provided with welfare supports as required. Tusla have seconded an experienced social worker to the Department of Justice and Equality to liaise directly between Direct Provision and Tusla services.

Departmental Functions

526. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which the investigative structures within her Department or bodies under her aegis are deemed adequate to meet current and future requirements as evaluated by reference to the time taken to respond to individual cases; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44004/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, is required under the Child Care Act 1991 to investigate allegations of abuse, including historical abuse, and to engage with An Garda Síochána where appropriate.

Tusla provides a comprehensive range of services and supports for vulnerable children and families. I have secured an additional €40 million for Tusla in the Budget, bringing the Agency's allocation to over €753 million in 2018. This additional funding will target areas of identified need. It will allow Tusla to recruit over 300 staff, reducing the number of unallocated cases and improving response times and performance.

I am committed to the protection and welfare of children and believe that there is a moral duty on Government and on society to work together to protect children and to ensure their safety. Within the limits of the budgetary process, I have sought to maximise the resources available for this important work and the effectiveness of their use.

Youth Justice Strategy

527. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which support services exist to rehabilitate and educate or upskill first-time juvenile offenders with specific reference to the need to ensure that such first-time offenders do not become subject to the influence of recidivists; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44005/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Children Act 2001, as amended, provides the statutory basis for dealing with children who come into contact with the criminal justice system. The key principle of the Children Act 2001 is that detention of a child should only be imposed as a last resort. When children come into contact with the criminal justice system there is an emphasis on the promotion of community based options in the first instance. The Irish Youth Justice Service oversees a significant investment in community based programmes to divert young people from further involvement in criminal or anti-social behaviour. In 2017, approximately €14 million was allocated by the Department of Justice and Equality to the Irish Youth Justice Service to administer Garda Youth Diversion Projects and a number of other youth diversion community-based projects. These projects also benefit from support under the European Social Fund.

My Department provides funding to the Irish Youth Justice Service for services relating to the Oberstown Children Detention Campus (Oberstown) and the Bail Supervision Scheme which has recently been established on a pilot basis.

The Bail Supervision Scheme provides more therapeutic supports in the community for children who are subject to bail conditions. The service provides a 'wraparound' service to the young person and their family with a prescribed reporting system back to the courts through the appropriate statutory bodies; Probation Service, An Garda Síochána and Oberstown. The scheme offers greater options to the courts in the knowledge that closer monitoring will take place through interaction with the young people, their families and communities.

If a child is remanded or sentenced to a period of detention in Oberstown, a range of rehabilitative supports are offered to every child as part of an overall programme, which focuses on the child's individual needs and provides the framework for each child's individual journey through detention. The focus is on developing supportive relationships with the main emphasis placed on education and rehabilitation.

The wide range of rehabilitation, education and support services provided and supported by the Irish Youth Justice Service are detailed in the Tackling Youth Crime: Youth Justice Action Plan 2014 – 2018, and a progress report covering the period 2014 to 2015 has been published and is available on my Department's website. A progress report covering the period of 2016 is

currently being prepared.

Counselling Services Provision

528. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which she envisages improved counselling services for children at risk and their families; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44006/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Under the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency is required to support and promote the development, welfare and protection of children. Tusla provides funding to voluntary organisations offering a range of counselling and support services to children and families including:

- Marriage and relationship counselling,
- Child counselling,
- Rainbows Peer Support Programme for children,
- Bereavement counselling and support on the death of a family member.

Counselling services funded by Tusla are specifically targeted at children who have been affected by parental separation or who have suffered family bereavement. Tusla's marriage and relationship counselling funding is instrumental in assisting parents to deal with difficulties they experience in their personal relationships. The funding provided aims to make counselling available to those who could not otherwise afford it.

Tusla is also proposing to put in place a range of additional Therapy Services for children and young people.

The Assessment, Consultation & Therapy Service (ACTS) is a national specialised clinical service which has been developed in order to provide multidisciplinary consultation, assessment and focused interventions to young people who have high risk behaviours associated with complex clinical needs. ACTS also supports other professionals in their ongoing work with young people and their families.

Tusla works closely with other care providers including the HSE, in respect of access to child and adolescent mental health services.

The protection and welfare of children and young people is of great concern to me, and I will continue to support Tusla in assisting children and young people at risk.

In this context, I announced a significant increase in the funding allocation to Tusla for next year. Tusla will have available to it some €753 million in funding, representing an increase of over €40 million over 2017. The precise level of funding to be provided to counselling, therapy and support services will be considered by Tusla in developing its Business Plan for 2018.

Children in Care

529. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children in residential or foster care; the extent to which adequate resources remain available to meet the demand in both circumstances; and if she will make a statement on the

matter. [44007/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): At the end of July 2017, the latest data available, there were 6,297 children living in care in Ireland. Of these, 5,801 children were living in foster care, and 368 in residential care. The remaining children are in other placements, such as supported lodging, specialist care facilities or long term hospital placements.

The optimum provision of services for the care and protection of children in Ireland is of the utmost importance to me and central to the work of my Department. Of course, this presents challenges and requires adequate funding and resources.

It is with this in mind, I am pleased to inform the Deputy that I have secured an additional €40.6 million in funding for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, bringing the Agency's allocation to over €753 in 2018.

This will enable Tusla to target areas of identified need. In relation to foster care, there will be increased recruitment of social workers to support and recruit foster carers. A dedicated telephone service will be established providing social work support out of hours to all foster carers, for the first time.

The additional funding will also allow us to further develop our residential care services, providing safe and homely accommodation for some of our most vulnerable children and young people.

Children in Care

530. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which the welfare of children in State care or institutions continues to be monitored effectively; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44008/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has a statutory duty under the Child Care Act 1991 to promote the welfare of children who are not receiving adequate care and protection, and if necessary, to receive a child into the care of the State.

The placement of children in care is governed by Regulations. These provide, inter alia, for the welfare of the child, the care practices, care records, accommodation and safety precautions. Children, depending on their identified needs, may be placed by their social worker in foster care either with relatives or general foster carers, in residential care, high support or special care or other placement types. The majority of children are placed in long term stable placements and currently over 92% of children are placed in foster care. A key part of the social worker role is to ensure the quality and safety of the child's placement, and to meet with the child on a one to one basis on all visits. There are safeguards surrounding each child care placement, whether foster or residential care and all placements are supervised by a professionally qualified social worker.

All foster care services and statutory residential centres are subject to inspection by the Health Information Quality Authority (HIQA) and private and voluntary residential centres are inspected by Tusla against National Standards. These inspection reports of children's residential centres, fostering services and child protection services are also reviewed and analysed by my officials. The overview of these reports provides me with a level of assurance on the overall capacity of Tusla to identify and provide services to families and children who are at risk.

Within its national office, Tusla, has a dedicated Quality Assurance Team. This team produces monthly, quarterly and annual reports in respect of Tusla's functions, including detailed reporting on child safety and protection services. Tusla also provides me with information on children in care, their placement type, care status and allocation of social workers. Within my Department there is a Unit which scrutinises these reports and briefs me and senior officials on issues of note. The reports also provide statistical evidence of improvements to child welfare and protection services and highlights challenges and areas where further improvement is required, such as the recruitment of additional social workers.

Officials from my Department meet Tusla management on a regular basis to review the level of service provision, including areas in need of improvement. I myself meet on a regular basis with the CEO and Chair of Tusla. Contact is maintained with non-governmental bodies on issues within the sector, including, for example, the Children's Rights Alliance, EPIC and the Irish Foster care Association.

The Deputy should also be aware that children in care have access to independent advocacy supports, such as the organisation Empowering People in Care (EPIC). Children in care also have access to the complaints mechanism in Tulsa, and may make complaints, or be assisted to make complaints, about their care to the Office of the Ombudsman for Children.

Youth Services

531. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the extent to which her Department continues to support County Kildare youth services; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44009/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work involving approximately 1,400 youth work staff working in youth services and communities throughout the country.

In 2017, €57.4 million has been allocated in current funding to support the provision of youth services. Budget 2017 and 2018 provided a total of €7 million extra funding for youth services. The additional funding is being used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services.

In 2017, an amount of €525,425 was allocated for the projects and services under Kildare Youth Services, which operates under Youth Work Ireland. My Department provides funding to Kildare Youth Services under the Special Projects for Youth Scheme in respect of six local youth projects in Athy, Naas, Leixlip, Newbridge, the Curragh and Kildare town and a Youth Information Centre in Naas.

In addition, I was pleased to approve the establishment the Local Youth Club Equipment Scheme in 2017. The primary focus of this scheme will be to assist volunteer led clubs and groups that work with young people in communities throughout the country. The scheme will allow for the purchase of equipment for sport, arts, adventure and other much needed items. Some €6.35 million has been made available nationally, of which more than €230,000 has been allocated in respect of clubs and groups operating in Kildare and Wicklow.

Departmental Funding

532. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount of funding per annum a charity (details supplied) received for 2016 or the nearest available year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43661/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department provides funding to the organisation in question through the Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO). This scheme provides multi-annual funding to national organisations towards the core costs associated with the provision of their services. The current three year scheme commenced on 1 July 2016. Following a competitive application process, the organisation in question was allocated a total of €269,960 over the three years to 30 June 2019.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme

533. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the criteria, selection processes and scoring mechanisms used to decide awards under the 2017 town and village grants by application, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43402/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The 2017 Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched on 13 April last, with a focus on improving the economic development of our rural towns and villages. The scheme forms an important part of the Action Plan for Rural Development.

When the scheme was launched, Local Authorities were given full particulars of how the scheme would operate, including the scheme outline and detailed information regarding the qualifying conditions, assessment criteria and scoring system that would be applied.

Detailed as follows is the Scoring framework for the Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2017 which formed part of the Scheme Outline and Application Form which were circulated to all Local Authorities in April 2017.

A minimum threshold of 65% was required for each criterion and the mark required to meet this benchmark is also outlined as follows for each criterion.

Selection Criteria	Detailed Outline	Max Score	Quality Threshold
Economic Development Potential	Does the project include activities that have clear positive economic impacts? Does the project complement or leverage other Government programmes and objectives? Does the proposal add value to current initiatives? For projects exceeding €100,000 does the project demonstrate a strong economic case?	30	19.5

Selection Criteria	Detailed Outline	Max Score	Quality Threshold
Strategic nature of the proposal and coherence with local area plans/healthcheck	What evidence is there that the project proposal is in line with the aims and objectives of local area plans? Did the application seek input from local community or business interests?	20	13
Demonstration of need and potential	Does the proposal include a clear statement of identified needs? Does the proposed plan of action address the needs identified? Does the proposal show engagement with the local community or business interests in the formulation of the project proposal?	20	13
Realistic nature of the proposal?	Are a clear set of defined outputs and outcomes included in the proposal? Has a delivery mechanism been identified? Is there a process in place to measure outcomes and impact of the proposal over time?	15	9.75
Value for Money	Extent to which projects are clear and include targets, realistic costing and timescales. Clear rationale for costs requested. The cost effectiveness of the proposal with regard to the level, range and quality of outputs and outcomes to be delivered.	15	9.75
Total		100	65

Departmental Bodies Data

534. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the State bodies or boards that fall under the remit of his Department; and the number of members of each State body or board who are not qualified within the field in which the board or body has oversight. [43420/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Four state bodies fall under the remit of my Department, Pobal, Irish Water Safety, the Western Development Commission and the Charities Regulatory Authority.

The Public Appointments Service (PAS), established under statute in 2004, provides an independent shared service for recruitment, assessment and selection of suitable candidates to organisations across the civil and public service. On 30 September 2014, the Government agreed that the PAS should also be given responsibility for putting in place an open, accessible, rigorous and transparent system to support Ministers in making appointments to State boards. The dedicated website, www.stateboards.ie, is the channel through which the PAS advertises vacancies on State boards. It is also the means through which accomplished, experienced and qualified people, including people who might not previously have been identified as available for appointment, can apply to be considered for particular vacancies and can register to have suitable vacancies notified to them.

A rigorous process of selection was applied to all applicants for our boards and the final selection ensured a full complement of experience, qualifications and expertise. I am satisfied

that the Board members are qualified within the field in which the board or body has oversight.

State Body	Number of Board Members
Pobal	17
Irish Water Safety	13
Western Development Commission	11
Charities Regulatory Authority	14

Seniors Alert Scheme

535. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to introduce a home alarm monitoring system for the elderly in partnership with a service provider as part of budget 2018. [43595/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department is responsible for the Seniors Alerts Scheme, which encourages support for vulnerable older people in our community through the provision of personal monitored alarms to enable them to continue to live securely in their homes with confidence, independence and peace of mind. Funding is available under the scheme towards the purchase by a registered community-based organisation of equipment, i.e. a personal alarm and/or pendant, which is provided to the elderly person participating, while the associated monitoring and service charges are the responsibility of the individual participant.

The scheme is administered on my Department's behalf by Pobal. Following a recent review of the scheme, a new iteration of the Seniors Alert Scheme will shortly be launched.

Dormant Accounts Fund

536. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the statutory review of the disbursement scheme for the dormant accounts fund due in December 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43622/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The legislation governing the Dormant Accounts Fund provides for the preparation of a three-year Disbursement Scheme which sets out the guiding principles for disbursements from the Fund to support programmes and projects targeting specified categories of disadvantaged people.

The legislation also provides that a review should be carried out within 3 years of the first scheme taking effect, and at least once in every three years thereafter. The first Disbursement Scheme covered the period 2013 to 2016.

The Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, which had responsibility for the Dormant Accounts schemes at the time, initiated a review of the 2013-2016 Disbursement Scheme in November 2016, with a view to preparing a new three-year scheme. In reviewing the Scheme, the Department consulted with relevant Government Departments and asked them to examine the previous scheme and to submit any proposals for amendments to the new scheme.

A new three-year Disbursement Scheme, covering the period 2017-2019 inclusive, was laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas on 8 May 2017.

Notwithstanding the work carried out in the preparation of the new scheme, I can confirm

that my Department intends to examine all aspects of the administration of the Dormant Accounts Fund Disbursement Scheme as part of its forthcoming work programme, including a further review of the effectiveness of the 2013-2016 Scheme.

Dormant Accounts Fund

537. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the balance in the Dormant Accounts Fund at the end of September 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43623/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Dormant Accounts Act 2001, together with the Unclaimed Life Assurance Policies Act 2003 and the Dormant Accounts (Amendment) Acts 2005-2012, provide a framework for the administration of unclaimed accounts in credit institutions (i.e. banks, building societies and An Post) and unclaimed life assurance policies in insurance undertakings. The Dormant Accounts Fund is managed by the National Treasury Management Agency.

The legislation governing the Fund provides for a scheme for the disbursement of funds that are unlikely to be reclaimed, for the purposes of supporting programmes or projects to assist specified disadvantaged groups. My Department coordinates these disbursement schemes.

Since its establishment in April 2003 to the end of September 2017, inflows to the Dormant Accounts Fund have totalled some €941.5 million, including interest earned of approximately €41 million.

Payments made from the Fund amount to €649.6 million, including €357.87 million reclaimed by account holders.

When account is taken of a reserve for future claims by account holders, and commitments to be disbursed by the NTMA on foot of approvals to projects and programmes, the net value of the Dormant Accounts Fund stood at €124.8 million at the end of September 2017.

Dormant Accounts Fund

538. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development why his Department spent less than half of the amount provided for in Vote Estimates from the Dormant Accounts Fund in the 2012 to 2016 period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43624/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The programmes and projects funded through the Dormant Accounts Fund are implemented through a number of Government Departments. It is a matter for the Accounting Officers of the relevant Departments to comment on underspends which occurred on programmes or projects which came under their Departments' remit over the period 2012-2016.

Statutory responsibility for the Dormant Accounts Fund, along with certain measures administered by the former Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government and the former Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, were transferred to my Department on 27th July 2017.

I will be seeking to ensure that any measures operated by my own Department which are supported by the Dormant Accounts Fund are run as effectively as possible and that the funding

provided is fully utilised.

Dormant Accounts Fund

539. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of the 2015 and 2016 action plans relating to the disbursement scheme; the reason for the delay in publication; when they will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43625/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Responsibility for the Dormant Accounts Fund disbursement schemes transferred from the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government to the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in May 2016. It subsequently transferred to my Department on 27 July 2017.

While the Deputy's question relates to periods prior to the transfer of responsibility to my Department, I understand that while there was no Action Plan for 2015, a Dormant Accounts Action Plan for 2016 was laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas on 14 April 2016.

Dormant Accounts Fund

540. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of disbursement reports, similar to the disbursement of moneys from the investment and disbursements accounts annual report 2014, that have been published on an annual basis prior to this report; the reports that have been published since; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43626/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Prior to 2013, disbursements from the Dormant Accounts Fund were managed by the Dormant Accounts Disbursement Board and, subsequently, by the Dormant Account Board.

The Dormant Accounts (Amendment) Act 2012 dissolved the Dormant Accounts Board and transferred the statutory functions of the Board to the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government with effect from 1st January 2013.

The Act provides that the Minister shall prepare and furnish an annual report to the Government on the disbursement of monies from the Dormant Accounts Funds to programmes and projects during the preceding year. The first annual report following the transfer of these functions was in respect of 2014.

Responsibility for the Dormant Accounts Fund disbursement schemes transferred to the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in May 2016 and subsequently to my Department on 27th July 2017. I will be bringing the Annual Reports on the operation of the Dormant Accounts Fund disbursement schemes for 2015 and 2016 to Government for approval shortly with a view to their publication.

Leader Programmes Funding

541. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the value of increase in the Leader allocation for 2018 compared to the allocation for 2017 that

was announced in budget 2017; and if the 2017 budget allocation was revised at some point, the detail of same. [43896/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The total amount of funding provided for the LEADER Programme over the period 2014-2020 is €250 million. LEADER is a multi-annual programme and the €250 million will be drawn down over the full lifetime of the programme.

The original allocation for LEADER for 2017 was €40 million, as reflected in the Vote for the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Following the transfer of functions from that Department to the Department of Rural and Community Development in July this year, a review of expenditure was carried out across all transferring programme areas in the context of the preparation of the 2018 Budget and Estimates.

While project approvals under LEADER have increased substantially since June, total expenditure under LEADER this year is likely to be less than anticipated. My Department therefore sought approval from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to transfer €10 million from the LEADER subhead (reducing allocation to €30 million in 2017) to support measures under the Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) in 2017. There was clearly sufficient demand to support the LIS scheme this year and the transfer of funding from LEADER does not, in any way, reduce the Government's commitment to provide €250 million to LEADER over the duration of the programme.

The revisions to the allocations will be reflected in a Further Revised Estimate for my Department which will be presented to the Select Committee on Rural and Community Development shortly.

The provision sought in the 2018 Estimates for the LEADER programme is €35 million. I am satisfied this level of increase is in line with anticipated activity under the LEADER Programme in 2018. I will be keeping this under review.

Rural Development Programme Funding

542. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the detail of the €1.8 million increase to the rural and community affairs programme expenditure line in budget 2018; and the amount that will be spent on the Leader programme. [43897/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department's allocation under the recently published Expenditure Report 2018 has increased by €19.3 million to €212.3 million, compared to 2017. Additional details and information in relation to the programme allocations will be contained in the Revised Estimates Volume for Public Services 2018, which will be published in due course.

Dormant Accounts Fund

543. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when the dormant accounts funding scheme for social enterprises will reopen to applicants for 2018-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43913/17]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Earlier this year, I approved €1.65 million in funding under the 2016 Dormant Accounts Action Plan for 42 social enterprise projects, to enhance their capacity to deliver services and generate traded

income.

My Department also this year published the 2017 Dormant Accounts Fund Action Plan which contains details of specific programmes and projects across Government which will be funded through the Dormant Accounts Fund. This Action Plan includes a number of measures to support social enterprises, including initiatives within my own Department's remit and from the Irish Prison Services.

My Department will coordinate the preparation of a Dormant Accounts Action Plan for 2018 and will invite Departments to submit proposals for inclusion in the Plan. It will be open to Departments to include in this Plan further initiatives to support social enterprises. From my own Department's perspective, I envisage that the 2018 Plan will once again include a number of measures to support the sector.

My Department is currently developing a comprehensive National Policy on Social Enterprise which will provide a framework for the development of the sector into the future. I hope to be in a position to support the implementation of this policy through a call for proposals under the Social Enterprise measure of the Dormant Accounts Fund early in 2018.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

544. **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. [43425/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department is currently experiencing delays in the processing of Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) claims due to an increase in claim volumes and the need for more detailed decisions to be provided, following a High Court ruling. Corrective actions are in place, including additional deciding officers assigned to the scheme. As a result average processing times have reduced over recent weeks and at present it is taking on average 17 weeks to finalise an application.

Applications are processed in date of receipt order, having regard to the complexity of each individual case. An application for DCA was received in the Department from this lady on the 22 June 2017. While it is not feasible to provide an exact date for when a particular application will be finalised, the applications currently being finalised were received in late May/early June 2017. This application will be considered by a Deciding Officer and the decision notified as soon as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Payments

545. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason the illness benefit of a person (details supplied) was suspended; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43619/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned suffered an injury at work in November 2016 and claimed Injury Benefit which was awarded and paid.

It is standard procedure that customers claiming Injury Benefit and Illness Benefit are routinely referred for a medical assessment by a Medical Assessor of this Department following which their cases are reviewed by a Deciding Officer.

In this case the person concerned has already been assessed by a Medical Assessor twice and on both occasions the Medical Assessor's opinion was that he is capable of work. However, the Deciding Officer, while reviewing the case, noted that both of his assessments were conducted by the same Medical Assessor and arrangements have been made for him to be examined by a different Medical Assessor.

If, on further review, he continues to be considered capable of work he will have the option to appeal this decision to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office. If he is deemed not capable of work payment of his Illness Benefit will be reinstated and backdated to May 2017 when it was suspended.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Jobseeker's Benefit Eligibility

546. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) who was previously employed in County Donegal was not paid jobseeker's benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43620/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Entitlement to Jobseeker's Benefit (JB) is based on PRSI contributions paid by the customer.

The main provisions relating to JB are contained in Chapter 12 of Part II of the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act, 2005, and Chapter 5 of Part 2 of the Social Welfare (Consolidated Claims, Payments and Control) Regulations, 2007 (S.I. No. 142 of 2007) as amended. Article 65 of the regulations refers to a separate class of workers called 'frontier workers'. Article 1 (f) defines a frontier worker as any employed or self-employed person who works in the territory of a Member State and lives in the territory of another Member State to which s/he returns as a rule daily or at least once a week.

Article 65 provides that where such a worker becomes partially unemployed (e.g. part-time workers), the State in which that person is normally employed is responsible for paying unemployment benefits. However, where a frontier worker becomes fully unemployed, the State in which s/he is resident will be responsible for paying the benefit.

As the person concerned is a frontier worker, who is fully unemployed, they should apply for benefit from the Member State where they reside. Any contributions made by the person concerned in this State will be taken into consideration when determining entitlement to unemployment security benefits in that jurisdiction.

Free Travel Scheme

547. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a passenger survey on public transport will be commissioned to assess the true costs of the free travel scheme to CIÉ, thereby making payment patterns from her Department more transparent. [43649/17]

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

Department makes a block payment to the CIÉ Group and the apportionment of payment between the three constituent companies, Bus Éireann, Bus Átha Cliath and Iarnród Éireann is a matter for the CIE Group to determine. In 2016, €61.4 million was paid to the CIE Group for the free travel scheme.

In the early years of the free travel scheme surveys of passenger numbers were carried out by CIE with their rate of payment being adjusted to take account of the survey results, fare increases and increases in numbers qualified. Given the large numbers of passengers involved it would not be feasible to return to surveys of passengers now. The block payment to the CIE group is a service charge that has been negotiated over the years based on a range of factors including passenger numbers, fare levels, availability and frequency of services, peak time access, service improvements and enhancements. While there are no plans to return to the survey process of public transport companies my Department, the Department of Transport and the National Transport Authority have been reviewing the payment mechanisms and funding levels for the scheme. The use of the free travel variant of the Public Services Card will also provide journey data in this regard.

It is important to note also that in Budget 2018, I announced an additional investment of €10 million for the free travel scheme.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Benefit Applications

548. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for carer's benefit by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43381/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I confirm that my Department received an application for carer's benefit from the person concerned on 3 August 2017. The application is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

549. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43383/17]

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, decided to disallow the appeal of the person concerned by way of a summary decision. The person concerned was notified of the Appeals Officer's decision on 7 September 2017.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

550. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43384/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 24 August 2017. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department for Employment Affairs and Social Protection. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 13 September 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.

Invalidity Pension Eligibility

551. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the eligibility for invalidity pension in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43387/17]

Minister of State at the Department of 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 PRSI contribution conditions are that the person must have at least 260 (5 years) paid contributions since entering social insurance and 48 contributions paid or credited in the last complete contribution year before the date of their claim. Only PRSI classes A, E or H contributions are reckonable for IP purposes.

New regulations will come into effect from 1 December 2017 whereby class S (self-employment) contributions will be reckonable for IP purposes.

To date there is no record in my department of receipt of a claim for IP from the gentleman in question. According to the department's records, it appears that this gentleman does not satisfy the PRSI contribution criteria for IP at present. However, entitlement to IP can only be definitively determined on receipt of a completed claim form.

Persons who have an insufficient employment/PRSI record to qualify for a social insurance benefit/pension may apply for the appropriate means-tested social assistance scheme. For example, persons between the ages of 16 and 66 who are suffering from an illness or disability which is expected to last at least 1 year, may qualify for disability allowance (DA). DA is subject to a medical assessment, a means test and a habitual residency test.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Eligibility

552. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the eligibility for fuel allowance in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43388/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned submitted an application for Illness Benefit commencing 6 March 2017, but did not satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

Although this claim was awarded, no payment was due. The person concerned is currently in receipt of a Supplementary Welfare Allowance payment.

Generally speaking, subject to some other conditions, the fuel allowance is payable to persons who are receiving certain long term social welfare payments. Illness benefit and Supplementary Welfare Allowance are not regarded as long term payments and, accordingly, the fuel allowance is not payable with them.

Disability Allowance is a means tested payment where a person has a disability which is expected to last for at least twelve months. Fuel allowance is payable with this benefit. The person concerned might like to consider making an application for Disability Allowance – application forms are available in the local Intreo Centre or Social Welfare Branch Office .

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits

553. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will review the position of those social welfare recipients who attend a training course with the national learning network or similar bodies and on returning to a jobseeker's allowance payment are not entitled to receive the Christmas bonus. [43391/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I was pleased to announce on Budget Day that an 85% Christmas Bonus will be paid this year to over 1.2 million long-term social welfare recipients, such as pensioners, people with disabilities, carers, lone parents and long-term jobseekers at a cost of €219 million.

Recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) must be in receipt of the payment for a minimum of 15 months (391 days) in order to be eligible for the bonus. Long-term jobseekers are eligible for the bonus in recognition of their being wholly or mostly financially dependent on their welfare payment for income.

A person who participated in a National Learning Network (NLN) or other Solas/ETB training course and is in receipt of JA for a minimum of 391 days in the relevant week of the Bonus payment will automatically qualify for and receive the Bonus.

People with less than 391 days duration on JA may be entitled for the bonus if they have 15 months duration in total on eligible payments or schemes (including NLN courses). The time spent on the training course will be taken into account when determining eligibility for the Bonus.

As it is not possible to identify these cases automatically through the Department's IT systems, it is necessary to deal with each case on an individual basis. In this regard, affected JA

recipients should go to their Intreo office in order to establish their entitlement to a bonus payment. It should be noted that it is not possible for the Department to establish entitlement for the bonus in these cases until the first week of December.

Payment of the bonus to existing NLN or Solas/ETB participants is a matter for the Department of Education and Skills.

Social Welfare Appeals

554. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an appeal by a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43399/17]

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 5 October 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.

If the means of the person concerned are insufficient to meet his needs, it is open to him to contact his local Intreo Centre to explore his possible entitlement to a means tested payment under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme pending the outcome of his Jobseeker's Benefit appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals

555. **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. [43400/17]

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 3 August 2017. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Departmental Bodies Data

556. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the State bodies or boards that fall under the remit of her Department; and the number of members of each State body or board who are not qualified within the field for which the board or body has oversight. [43414/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The statutory bodies operating under the aegis of my Department are the Citizens Information Board, the Pensions Authority, the Pensions Council, the Pensions Ombudsman, the Social Welfare Tribunal and the Low Pay Commission.

None of the above is a professional body or board within the meaning of the Deputy's question.

Disability Allowance Applications

557. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for disability allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43431/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I can confirm that my Department is in receipt of an application for disability allowance (DA) from this lady. The claim was referred by a deciding officer (DO) to a social welfare investigative officer (SWI) for a report on the person's means and circumstances.

The SWI met with this lady on 14 September 2017 and outlined to her the documents needed in order to progress the claim. This was followed up by a written request for the documentation. However, she has so far failed to provide same. Once the SWI has submitted his/her report to the DO, a decision will be made on the application and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals Status

558. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43432/17]

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 8 June 2017. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought from the Department for Employment Affairs and Social Protection. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on 2 August 2017 and the case has been 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.

Fuel Allowance Applications

559. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a lump sum for fuel allowance will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43441/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned is currently in receipt of Fuel Allowance and is receiving this payment on a weekly basis. It is not possible to issue a lump sum fuel payment for the current period as applications have now closed, however the person concerned can complete the Fuel Allowance lump sum form before December 2017 in order to receive the second Fuel Lump sum in January 2018.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Free Travel Scheme Eligibility

560. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full year cost of providing all persons in receipt of a long-term illness payment with a free travel pass. [43446/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The current free travel scheme provides free travel on the main public and private transport services for those eligible under the scheme. These include road, rail and ferry services provided by companies such as Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann, as well as Luas and services provided by almost 80 private transport operators. There are approximately 894,000 customers in receipt of free travel.

Persons resident in Ireland who are over 66 and persons in receipt of certain social welfare payments are eligible for the scheme. The social welfare payments that allow persons aged under 66 to a free travel pass include disability allowance, invalidity pension, carer's allowance and partial capacity benefit. Disability allowance and invalidity pension are both long term illness payments, and so people in receipt of those payments will already have eligibility.

People may claim illness benefit for up to 2 years. People on illness benefit do not receive the free travel pass. However, a person who has been in receipt of illness benefit for at least 12 months and who most likely will be incapable of work for at least another 12 months, or who may be permanently incapable of work, may apply for invalidity pension which is a qualifying payment for the free travel pass.

The information sought by the Deputy on the estimated full year cost of providing all persons in receipt of long term illness payments with a free travel pass is not available to my Department. Any such cost would manifest itself in the form of requests for increased funding by transport providers, based on increased numbers using the scheme on their service, and so would depend on a number of factors including the type of travel pass issued (e.g., single or companion pass), the number of journeys made using the free travel pass, the prevailing fares, and the type of journeys undertaken, i.e., rail, bus or Luas.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rural Social Scheme Assessments

561. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason persons on the rural social scheme are being called repeatedly for assessments particularly in rural County Kerry (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43455/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The rural social scheme (RSS) provides opportunities for farmers and fishermen/women who are currently in receipt of specified social welfare payments to work to provide certain services of benefit to rural communities. The Government is very aware that communities benefit from the skills and talents of local farmers and fishermen and participants have the opportunity to improve existing skills, or develop new skills, while performing this valuable work in their local communities. In recognition of this fact, an additional 250 RSS places were announced last week as part of Budget 2018.

To remain eligible to participate on the RSS, an individual must continue to maintain an underlying entitlement to Farm/Fish Assist. This ensures that only those in need of income support for their farming/fishing enterprise benefit from the scheme. Thus, the rate of payment made to a participant can be reviewed at any stage to ensure that they continue to be eligible and that they receive their correct entitlement. This practice has been in place since the commencement of the scheme and applies to all participants on the scheme regardless of their location.

Table 1 gives a breakdown by county of the number of RSS participants at end September 2017 and a breakdown of the RSS reviews for the period Jan-end Sept 2017.

This table clearly indicates that participants on the RSS in all counties have been subjected to review, where appropriate, to ensure continuing entitlement to the scheme in accordance with the rules underpinning it.

Table 1

County	No. RSS participants at end Sept 2017	No. of Reviews in 2017 (Jan –30th Sept)
Carlow	18	1
Cavan	80	2
Clare	140	10
Cork	179	8
Donegal	244	8
Galway	317	27
Kerry	293	19
Kildare	24	0
Kilkenny	14	1
Laois	21	0
Leitrim	105	3
Limerick	87	8
Longford	57	5
Louth	12	1
Mayo	583	47
Meath	20	1
Monaghan	41	3
Offaly	49	2

County	No. RSS participants at end Sept 2017	No. of Reviews in 2017 (Jan –30th Sept)
Roscommon	149	8
Sligo	136	5
Tipperary	67	4
Waterford	13	1
Westmeath	42	3
Wexford	39	1
Wicklow	22	1
Grand Total	2752	169

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 562 withdrawn.

State Pension (Contributory)

563. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address a matter regarding a request for information pertaining to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43470/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The budgetary increase to state pension (contributory) payments came into effect on 10 March 2017. The person concerned is in receipt of a reduced rate pension. The weekly increase of €5.00 was payable in full to those in receipt of the maximum rate of state pension (contributory), with a proportionate increase paid to all other recipients.

When the person concerned requested a copy of his insurance record from the Department, it was noted that certain additional contributions were not included when the original decision on entitlement was made. The person's entitlement to state pension (contributory) was reviewed and a higher rate of payment was awarded, with effect from 18 February 2005. The person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 18 May 2017 and provided with a copy of the social insurance record on which the decision was based.

The person concerned was also in receipt of an increase for qualified adult on their state pension (contributory) for the period 18 February 2005 to 3 October 2013, the date from which their spouse was awarded a state pension (contributory) in their own right. A review of the person's entitlement to increase of qualified adult was undertaken as the rate of increase for qualified adult payable is related to the claimant's rate of pension payment. Details of the qualified adult's means were requested as increase for qualified adult is a means-tested payment. The information requested has not yet been received by the Department.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Payments

564. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when payment will issue in respect of a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in issuing the payment in view of the fact that it has been with the payments and maintenance section for a significant period of time; and

if she will make a statement on the matter. [43481/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's benefit (CARB) is a payment made to insured people who leave the workforce to care for a person(s) in need of full-time care and attention.

A person can be considered to be providing full-time care and attention where they are engaged in employment, self-employment or on training courses outside the home for a maximum of 15 hours per week, provided that they can show to the satisfaction of a deciding officer that adequate care has been provided for the care recipient in their absence.

CARB was awarded for a period 21 July 2016 to 19 July 2017. Upon expiry of the claim on 28 July 2017 the person concerned made a further application to extend her period of benefit.

However, the information supplied was insufficient to enable a decision to be made. Accordingly additional information was requested from the person concerned on 7 October 2017 in relation to leave periods from her employment with Galway/Roscommon Education and Training Board.

Once the information is received the application will be processed without delay and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

565. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43484/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I confirm that my Department received an application for carer's allowance from the person concerned on 21 August 2017. The application is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Maternity Leave

566. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the recent changes to maternity leave regarding mothers whose babies are delivered prematurely will be extended to include mothers who are currently on maternity leave or who have recently returned to work; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43487/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): On 3 October 2017 I, together with my colleague the Minister for Justice and Equality, Charlie Flanagan T.D., announced increased maternity leave and maternity benefit for mothers whose babies are born prematurely.

Under the new arrangements, in addition to the current 26 weeks of paid maternity leave a mother will be entitled to an additional period of maternity leave and benefit where her baby is born prematurely, where she meets the ordinary qualifying criteria for the schemes. The

additional period will commence at the end of the standard 26 week period of paid maternity leave. The extended period to be added will be the number of weeks from the baby's actual date of birth up to two weeks before the expected date of confinement which would have been the 37th week of the pregnancy, at which point the current entitlement to 26 weeks leave and benefit would normally begin.

The Government decided that the additional maternity leave and benefit would be available for mothers of premature babies born on or after 1 October 2017 and my Department is now working to make sure the necessary arrangements are put in place to meet that deadline. There are no plans to extend the new arrangements to mothers of premature babies born before that date.

State Pension (Contributory)

567. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person can buy stamps to allow them receive full rate in their contributory pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43490/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): In order to qualify for a State pension (contributory), there are a number of conditions which must be met. A person should have paid social insurance contributions before the age of 56 and, for a person reaching state pension age after 6 April 2012, should have a minimum of 520 paid contributions.

To ensure that the individual can maximise their entitlement to a State pension, 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. Contributions can be paid on income from insurable employment or self-employment.

Employees who have gaps in their social insurance record where they are not in a position to pay PRSI, such as during periods of unemployment or illness, may be awarded credits which are taken into account in assessing the level of entitlement to State pension. Alternatively, where an individual is no longer paying PRSI as an employed or self-employed contributor, they can pay voluntary contributions, provided they satisfy the qualifying conditions of the scheme. The payment of voluntary contributions helps to protect future entitlement to State pension as they are also taken into account in determining the level of pension entitlement.

Where people cannot qualify for a full rate contributory pension as a result of an intermittent PRSI record, the social protection system provides alternative means-tested supports. For example, if their spouse has a contributory pension, a person may qualify for a means-tested increase for a qualified adult which is up to 90% of a full rate contributory pension. Alternatively, they may qualify for a means-tested State Pension (non-contributory), amounting up to 95% of the maximum contributory pension rate.

If a person has taken time out of the workforce on caring duties, they may have access to the Homemaker's Scheme. Under the Homemaker's Scheme, any years that a person spent as a homemaker (since 6 April 1994) are disregarded when working out their yearly average contributions for a contributory State pension. This may result in their qualifying for a higher rate of payment.

Rural Social Scheme Data

568. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of participants on the rural social scheme and community employment scheme in County Donegal on either a municipal area or employment exchange area basis, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43526/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Table 1 outlines the number of participants supported under the Rural Social Scheme (RSS) and Community Employment (CE) in County Donegal at the end of September, 2017.

Table 1

Scheme	Number of participants in County Donegal at end of September 2017
RSS	244
CE	1,093

Table 2 shows a breakdown of the CE participants by Local/Intreo Office:

Office	Number of CE participants
Ballyshannon	29
Ballybofey	205
Letterkenny	578
Gweedore	281

Records for participants on the RSS are not available on either a municipal area or employment exchange area basis as requested by the Deputy.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Payments

569. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will examine a case in which a person (details supplied) was awarded disability allowance but had the contributions to apply for invalidity pension; if she will take into consideration that the person has subsequently been awarded invalidity pension following the advice from this Deputy's office to apply for same; if arrears will issue in respect of invalidity pension in view of the fact the person had the contributions for invalidity pension and was on a reduced rate of disability allowance due to means; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43548/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Backdating of the Invalidity Pension claim of the lady concerned has been considered and the claim has now been awarded from 08 November 2012, i.e. from the first Thursday following receipt of her Disability Allowance application. Arrears for the period 08 November 2012 to 10 May 2017 (less any overlapping social welfare payment and/or outstanding overpayment) will issue shortly to her nominated bank account. She was notified of this decision on the 17 October 2017.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Eligibility

570. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address a matter regarding an application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43551/17]

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.

It is a condition for receipt of CA that the applicant's means are less than the statutory limit which in this case is €242.60 weekly.

The application for CA was disallowed as her means were determined to exceed the statutory limit.

Means are any income belonging to the carer and their spouse, civil partner, or cohabitant, property, (except their own home) or an asset that could bring in money or provide them with an income, for example occupational pensions, or pensions or benefits from another country.

The evidence before the deciding officer included a payslip dated 30 March 2017 which showed a gross income of €16,881.25 for 13 insurable weeks, averaging €1,298.56 per week. When allowable deductions of €110.58 were applied, the weekly assessable income was €1,187.98. A disregard for a married couple of €665.00 then applied and the remainder was halved. The carer's means were therefore assessed at €261.49 per week which is in excess of the statutory means limit of €242.60.

The person concerned was notified on 22 July 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and her right of review and appeal.

A review of this decision was requested on 3 August 2017 and following this review the deciding officer decided that her means still exceeded the statutory limit and that consequently there would be no change to the original decision.

The person concerned was notified of the outcome on 4 October 2017 and of her right of appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 571 withdrawn.

Social Welfare Overpayments

572. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will provide a detailed breakdown of a debt her Department is seeking a person (details supplied) to repay. [43597/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned does not currently have a debt with the Department. In previous correspondence with the Department the person concerned was advised, in error, that they had repaid in excess of the debt they had incurred. This error was corrected and the person concerned has been advised that they do not have a debt with the Department.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Family Income Supplement Eligibility

573. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she is satisfied that the policy of not awarding FIS to otherwise qualified persons whose renewal date coincides with a period of sick leave is compatible with equality legislation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43614/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Family Income Supplement (FIS) is weekly tax-free payment available to low-paid employees with one or more qualified children.

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.

FIS is awarded for 52 weeks at a time and on expiry of the 52 week period, all recipients must complete and submit a new application if they wish to continue to receive FIS.

Should a FIS recipient become ill and qualify for Illness Benefit or Injury Benefit, either benefit is payable in conjunction with FIS for 6 consecutive weeks only. If the sick leave extends for more than 6 weeks, the FIS payment is suspended until either the applicant resumes paid employment and submits a final medical certificate to the Department or until the 52 week FIS period expires (whichever is the earlier). This condition applies to all FIS recipients.

State Pension (Contributory) Applications

574. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a contributory State pension by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43639/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned applied for the state pension (contributory) on 25 November 2014. A mixed insurance *pro rata* state pension (contributory) was awarded, with effect from 26 May 2014, back-dated six months from the date of receipt. A decision letter to that effect issued to the applicant on 2 March 2015. The pension is based on the person's combined record of full and modified rate of social insurance contributions paid in Ireland.

In addition, the person's entitlement to a *pro rata* state pension (contributory) under EU regulations, based on their UK contributions, was examined. However, the person concerned does not have an entitlement to a pension of this type.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 575 withdrawn.

Youth Employment Initiative

576. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the details of the new youth employment support scheme announced in budget 2018; the

funding provided to this scheme; the date this scheme is expected to commence; the targets set; the numbers expected to participate in the scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43727/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) is a new work experience programme targeted at young jobseekers who are long-term unemployed or who face significant barriers to gaining employment – people who even during the Celtic Tiger years would have found it difficult to get a foothold on the career ladder. The programme aims to provide them with the opportunity to learn basic work and social skills in a supportive environment while on a work placement.

YESS will be open to jobseekers and other eligible cohorts who are aged between 18 and 24 and have been out of work and in receipt of a qualifying payment for at least 12 months or, if unemployed for less than 12 months, are considered by a case worker to face a significant barrier to work.

Candidates must be in receipt of one of the following qualifying payments: Jobseekers Allowance, Jobseekers Benefit, One Parent Family Payment, Jobseeker Transition Payment, Disability Allowance, Blind Person's Pension, Supplementary Welfare Allowance; or signing for Credits.

Although people will be encouraged and supported to avail of suitable placements, participation on YESS will be entirely voluntary – there will be no financial penalties for jobseekers who do not wish to participate or who do not complete a placement.

There will be clear eligibility requirements for host organisations wishing to participate in the programme. They will be required to sign up to Terms and Conditions when they advertise a placement.

The standard duration of the work experience programme will be 3 months, with an option to extend the placement further to 6 or 9 months following a review of progress by a Departmental case worker. The attendance requirement will be 30 hours per week. Participants will receive a weekly payment equivalent to the net minimum wage which represents a very significant increase on their underlying payment.

A designated case worker will liaise with the participant and the host organisation throughout the period of the placement, to monitor how well it is progressing for both parties and to provide appropriate advice and support.

Clearly defined learning and development outcomes for each placement will be identified, with a focus on 'soft' (employability) skills as well as any specific 'hard' skills that will be acquired and/or demonstrated during the placement. The host organisation will complete an assessment for the participant at the end of the placement.

Host organisations will be encouraged to hire participants who have performed well (i.e. offer them paid employment) and will qualify for a financial subsidy under *JobsPlus Youth*.

It is proposed to introduce the YESS in Quarter 2, 2018 as it will take some time to promote the new scheme to employers and participants. A dedicated budget of €1 million has been allocated for 2018. The full-year cost of the scheme is expected to be €7.5 million, catering for up to 1,600 participants.

Family Income Supplement Eligibility

577. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she is no longer planning on introducing a working family payment as committed to in the programme for Government in view of the fact that the Government has retained family income supplement as the working family payment; if so, the rationale behind this; her plans to reform the operation of FIS in terms of the number of hours required to be worked in order to receive this payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43728/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department’s approach to developing the working family payment was guided by two principles. First, that it should ensure that work pays, and second, that it should have a positive effect on reducing child poverty. To advance the commitment contained in the Programme for Partnership Government, the Department established an internal working group and an Inter-Departmental Group of the relevant Government Departments to consider proposals.

As part of this process the Department carried out an extensive analysis of its existing range of supports that are aimed at assisting individuals to take up employment. The analysis showed the existing in-work supports are very 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 Family Income Supplement and the Back to Work Family Dividend.

Consequently, the analysis carried out by the working group did not support the need for the establishment of a new scheme. In the context of Budget 2018 it was decided to re-designate the Family Income Supplement (FIS) scheme as the Working Family Payment (WFP), which will bring it more visibility as a payment aimed specifically at working families. The new name better reflects the nature of the payment and the Department would encourage families to look into seeing if they are eligible for the payment.

In relation to the working hours requirement associated with qualification for payment of the WFP, a person must be engaged in full-time insurable employment which is expected to last for at least 3 months and be working for a minimum of 38 hours per fortnight or 19 hours per week. This “hours worked” eligibility criterion has been reduced significantly since the introduction of the scheme in 1984, from 30 hours per week to 19 hours per week in 1996. It is important, however, to ensure that the WFP does not inadvertently subsidise unsustainably low earnings or encourage employers to offer minimal hours of employment.

For low-income workers with less than the minimum hours of employment for the WFP and working on a casual basis up to and including 3 days per week, the jobseeker’s allowance scheme provide in-work income support through daily disregards and tapered withdrawal of payments. Individuals on jobseeker’s benefit can also work up to 3 days per week. For each day they work they lose a proportionate reduction in their jobseeker’s benefit payment.

If a person cannot meet the 19 hours WFP threshold the Department offers a number of other schemes, which can provide income support that can be combined with earnings from employment, subject to each individual’s circumstances. These include jobseekers allowance and benefit (which permit an element of casual work), disability allowance, carer’s allowance, the one-parent family payment, jobseeker’s transitional payment and the part-time job incentive scheme. Combined, the Department provides an extensive system of social welfare support, which facilitates recipients taking up some employment while maintaining their social welfare payment.

Given all of the above there are no plans to reform the operation of the WFP in terms of the number of hours work required to qualify for payment.

JobsPlus Scheme

578. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the details of the enhanced JobsPlus recruitment incentive announced in budget 2018; the moneys allocated to same; the targets set; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43729/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy is aware, the JobsPlus incentive is designed to encourage employers and businesses to focus their recruitment efforts on those who have been out of work for long periods. It provides employers with two levels of payment - €7,500 or €10,000 - over two years, paid in monthly instalments, provided the employment is maintained. The €7,500 rate is paid to employers that recruit workers who have been on the Live Register for between 12 and 24 months. The €10,000 rate is paid to employers that recruit workers who have been on the Live Register for more than 24 months.

My Department recently conducted a Focused Policy Assessment of JobsPlus which highlighted that workers over the age of 50 are under-represented on the scheme. To address this, I have announced an enhancement to the scheme to encourage businesses to employ older workers. From 1 of January 2018, employers that recruit workers who are on the Live Register for over 12 months and are over the age of 50 will be paid at the higher rate of €10,000.

Currently, just over 10% of JobsPlus employees are over 50. It is envisaged that this change will increase the percentage of employees in this age category to between 20% and 25% over the coming years.

The budget allocated to JobsPlus in 2018 will be €30 million.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Schemes

579. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person must be in receipt of both the living alone allowance and the fuel allowance in order to qualify for the newly announced weekly telephone support allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43730/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The new telephone support allowance is targeted at those who are most in need. Accordingly, it is aimed at those living alone and of limited means as an aid to paying for communications and/or a home alert solution. Consequently, customers who qualify for the living alone allowance and who at the same time are in receipt of the fuel allowance (which is means tested allowance) will automatically qualify for the telephone support allowance.

I understand that there are currently over 124,000 customers who are likely to automatically qualify for this allowance at an estimated cost of €16.14 million in 2018. Customers are not required to make a specific application for this allowance as it will be paid to them automatically once available.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Non-Contributory) Applications

580. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a full review will be carried out of the application for the old age non-contributory pension for a person (details supplied); and the details of the calculations in view of the fact that the person is disputing the refusal totally. [43802/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): State pension non-contributory is a means tested pension. The person concerned originally applied for this pension on 12 October 2015. Following examination, the claim was disallowed as the person concerned had means in excess of the maximum weekly limit, and the person was notified of this decision. The claim was reviewed in early 2016, and again disallowed due to weekly means still exceeding the permissible limit. A further decision notification and letter of clarification issued to the person concerned in this regard on 3 March 2016. These notifications also informed the person concerned of their right of appeal to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office, should they consider the decision to be incorrect. The person concerned has not exercised this right of appeal to date.

It is also open to the person concerned, if there is any change in their weekly means, to re-apply for State pension non-contributory and their claim will be processed without delay.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Eligibility

581. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the social welfare entitlements for which a person (details supplied) qualifies. [43816/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Illness benefit is a payment for persons who cannot work due to illness and who satisfy the pay-related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions. For illness benefit claims made in 2017 the governing contribution year is 2015.

The rate of payment depends on the person's level of earnings in the governing PRSI contribution year. Where the average weekly earnings are €300 or more, the personal rate of payment is €193 weekly. A graduated rate applies where the average weekly earnings are less than €300.

The person concerned made a claim to illness benefit and this claim was registered in my Department on 15 September 2017. The person concerned qualifies for a graduated rate of illness benefit of €151.20 weekly, based on their earnings in the governing year, 2015. Payment has been made to the date of the latest medical certification received.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance is payable where a person's means are insufficient to meet their needs. Application may be made to the Community Welfare Services at the local Intreo centre. I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Humanitarian Assistance Scheme

582. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will amend the humanitarian assistance scheme in County Donegal to ensure that affected families who lost items such as children's toys, play and entertainment items and garden equipment are adequately compensated for their loss. [43870/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): My Department immediately activated the humanitarian assistance scheme, administered by the local Community Welfare Service (CWS), to assist householders in County Donegal affected by the flooding experienced towards the end of August.

Humanitarian assistance is designed to provide hardship alleviation, as opposed to compensation, to people affected by an emergency event. The scheme provides income-tested financial support to people whose homes are damaged from flooding and severe weather events and who are not in a position to meet costs for essential needs, replacement of household items and in some instances structural repair.

Assistance is not provided for losses which are covered by insurance or for commercial and business losses, or generally any loss or damage to private rented accommodation or local authority accommodation.

Guidance on the administration of the scheme is provided to Community Welfare Service staff. The guidance provided is not exhaustive and each case is considered on an individual basis to assist families replace essential belongings.

Any person experiencing hardship following the flooding in Donegal in August and indeed following the severe weather over the last twenty four hour period should contact my Department's local Community Welfare Service for assistance.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Services Programme

583. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the funding removed from a company (details supplied) by Pobal is still available for other interested parties or organisations in the area to apply for; if she will clarify same; the person in her Department who is responsible for processing a new application for support under the Pobal community services programme. [43871/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The organisation referred to by the Deputy is a not-for-profit co-operative society working to promote tourism and arts and crafts in the Inishowen peninsula in county Donegal. The company operates from two offices based in Buncrana and Carndonagh, which open five days per week. The company manages the website www.visitinishowen.com, develops packages and marketing material, prints brochures, collates visitors data and works with tourist trade operators to promote and package Inishowen as a 'must see' holiday destination. The company received Community Services Programme (CSP) funding of €117,645.50 per annum, which supported the employment of a manager and 4.5 staff delivering the service.

Following concerns raised regarding the company in early 2016, Pobal, on behalf of my Department, commissioned an independent review of its governance arrangements. The report, completed in December 2016, identified a number of serious governance issues and made 22 recommendations to address these. The company was issued with the report on 22 December 2016 and was given a deadline of 30th April 2017 to make progress on the recommendations

of the report.

Unfortunately, the company failed to make sufficient progress in implementing the report's recommendations and, in the circumstances, they were informed that CSP funding for the service could not continue through them beyond 30 June 2017. This decision was accepted by them at a meeting with members of their board on 9th May 2017.

I want to make clear to the Deputy that I do not wish to withdraw funding for the service being provided. However, in light of the governance issues identified, my Department could not continue to fund the service through the company in question.

Officials from my Department and Pobal continue to explore other options as to how funding for the service can be maintained going forward. Progress has been made and I am hopeful that a new entity, through which the funding can be delivered, will be in place before the end of the year. It is important to note that the funding will remain in the Inishowen region.

My Department will consider any expression of interest in relation to the promotion of tourism in the Inishowen area from a CSP funding perspective. The CSP Policy Unit within my Department is based in Carrick-on-Shannon.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pensions Legislation

584. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will re-examine the situation whereby women who were in the workforce and left in earlier years for family duties are not in a position to get the full State contributory pension when they reach retirement age; and her plans to address this situation. [43881/17]

593. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to reform the pension system, which it is perceived discriminates against persons, mainly women, who 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. [44029/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 584 and 593 together.

There are three main pensions paid by my Department to people over 66, the rates of payment of which vary depending on the scheme and the circumstances of the pensioner. Entitlement levels to the State Pension, contributory (SPC), which is financed by PRSI on a pay-as-you-go basis, 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 intention of this, as in the contributory pensions which exist in other European countries and elsewhere, is to incentivise and reward contributions into the fund which finance that pension, by means of higher pension entitlements. Those with relatively lower contributions are more likely to be paid under alternative pensions, where they will attract a higher rate of payment.

The homemaker's scheme makes qualification for a higher rate of SPC 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. It is estimated that backdating it in respect of periods before its introduction in 1994 would cost some €290 million per annum in 2017, and this figure would rise at a faster rate than the overall rise in the cost of State pensions.

Where people do not qualify for a maximum-rate SPC in their own right, the social protection system provides other ways of supporting such pensioners in old age. Where 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. This is paid directly to them, and is subject to a personal means-test. Alternatively, they may qualify for a State Pension (non-contributory), based on their household means, amounting up to 95% of the maximum contributory pension rate. There are very significant income and capital disregards in the means tests for these payments, which result in the large majority of payees – most of whom are women – being paid at the maximum rate. Where a person is a widow/widower, they will generally qualify for a full 100% rate pension, based on either their own PRSI or on that of their late spouse or civil partner.

The average pension payments made by my Department to men and women over 66 years of age are within 1% of each other approximately, and this results in very similar outcomes for older men and women in avoiding poverty. The most recent CSO figures for Consistent Poverty indicated that 2.6% of women over 65, and 2.9% of men over 65, are in consistent poverty, which is less than a third that of the general population. Eurostat figures also show that men and women over 65 are less likely to be at risk of poverty and social exclusion in Ireland than in the EU as a whole, with the gap in outcomes between men and women being significantly narrower in Ireland than most countries.

It is expected that the “Total Contribution Approach” (TCA) will 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. This is a very significant reform with considerable legal, administrative, and technical elements in its implementation. An important element in the final design of the scheme will be the position of women who have gaps in their contribution records as a result of caring duties, and this factor is being considered very carefully in developing this reform.

Officials in the Department are currently working on the detailed development of the TCA proposal. It is then intended to have a public consultation later this year, and this will provide an opportunity for people to submit their views on the priorities in the design of this proposal. 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.

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

585. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to consider a pension scheme for community employment supervisors; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43884/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Community Employment (CE) scheme supervisors are employees of private companies in the

community and voluntary sector. The State is not responsible for funding pension arrangements for such employees even where the companies in question are reliant on State funding. It is open to individuals to make provision for a pension by way of PRSA which all employers are obliged to facilitate.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the issue of CE supervisors' pension provision is currently being examined by a Community Sector High Level Forum, chaired by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. My Department is represented on this group, as are IMPACT, SIPTU, Pobal and other relevant Government Departments. The Forum is due to meet in again in early November and I understand that their work is ongoing.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

586. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a fuel allowance and a living alone allowance increase will be awarded to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43898/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): An increase for living alone can be claimed by a person in receipt of pension if they are living alone, or mainly alone. In this case, the person concerned is the qualified adult on their spouse's state pension (contributory) and is therefore not eligible for this increase. A letter informing the person of this decision was issued on 21 September 2017.

Similarly, Fuel Allowance can be claimed by a pension recipient, but not their qualified adult.

A letter has issued to the person concerned advising them to apply for a pension in their own right because if they qualify, they may also have an entitlement to additional increases in respect of living alone and fuel allowance.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

587. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will examine a case in which a person (details supplied) was awarded an increase for a qualified adult; if the fact the person did not know they were entitled to an increase for a qualified adult will be considered; if backdating can be made on same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43944/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Increase for a Qualified Adult on a State Pension (contributory) payment is a means tested payment.

The person concerned applied for an increase for qualified adult on their state pension (contributory) on 2 August 2017. The increase was awarded with effect from 2 June 2017, as prior to that date the qualified adult was in receipt of state pension (non-contributory) in their own right at a higher rate.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Family Income Supplement

588. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans for those who are self employed regarding family income supplement; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43956/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Working Family Payment (WFP), formerly known as Family Income Supplement, or FIS, is an in-work support which provides an income top-up for employees on low earnings. The WFP is designed to prevent in-work poverty for low paid workers with child dependants, and to offer a financial incentive to take-up employment. There are currently over 57,000 families with more than 127,000 children in receipt of the WFP. The estimated spend on the WFP this year is approximately €422 million.

To qualify for payment of the WFP, a person must be engaged in insurable employment which is expected to last for at least three months and be working for a minimum of 38 hours per fortnight or 19 hours per week. Therefore, self-employed people are not eligible for the WFP.

The rationale for not extending eligibility for the WFP to include self-employed persons includes:-

- the practical difficulties in defining and controlling an alternative to the hours worked condition;

- the difficulty in establishing satisfactorily a self-employed person's hours of employment and certifying this on an ongoing basis;

- existing arrangements to provide income support to self-employed people on low incomes, such as jobseeker's allowance and farm assist for low-income farmers;

- the cost of extending the scheme to the self-employed, which would be considerable.

Any extension of the WFP to other categories of persons, such as the self-employed, would have to be considered in a budgetary context. There are no plans for such an extension in present circumstances.

However, I would bring the Deputy's attention to the Back to Work Family Dividend, which helps families to move from social welfare into employment, including self-employment, by retaining their qualified child increase for up to two years. There are currently 8,156 families in receipt of the dividend, of whom 124 are in self-employment.

Social Insurance Fund

589. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the level of contact between her Department, in respect of trading businesses in which employers owe a debt to the Social Insurance Fund, and the Revenue Commissioners to establish if they are continuing to actively trade; if she will provide a copy of the memorandum of understanding between the two organisations with regard to following up debts by these employers; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43959/17]

590. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the level of debt owed by employers to the Social Insurance Fund in circumstances in

which these employers are continuing to trade; the number of such debts owed by band (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43965/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 589 and 590 together.

A debt is raised against the employer when a payment is made under the Redundancy and Insolvency Payment scheme from the Social Insurance Fund. The total employer debt to the SIF at 31 December 2016 stood at €462 million.

A comprehensive analysis on the trading status of all companies and businesses with a debt to the Social Insurance Fund was completed in April 2017. Approximately 13,400 individual employers owe a debt to the Social Insurance Fund.

A total of 9,305 of Irish registered companies account for the vast majority of employer debt (91%). The profile of these indebted companies indicates that the majority (63%) are either dissolved or are in the process of being wound up through receivership or liquidation. These account for almost €345 million of the total debt.

A third of indebted companies (c 3,450) has filed annual returns in recent years and are categorised as “normal” by the Companies Registration Office. These companies account for c €72 million of employer debt. While these companies continue to exist as a legal entity, it does not necessarily mean that they are trading.

A further 4,093 indebted employers are classified as sole traders and partnerships. These account for just over €41 million in employed debt (9% of the total). There is no central information source on the trading status of these non-registered businesses.

The Department has a dedicated debt management team in the redundancy and insolvency section which has responsibility for managing employer debt in line with the Department’s debt management policy. The team engages directly with employers who are categorised as normal, and with the non-registered sole traders and partnerships, with a view to recovering debt. The team makes contact with these employers to establish their financial position and ability to repay the debt in full or as part of an agreed debt repayment plan. In these cases the Department is mindful that an overly aggressive process in pursuing debt with employers that are still trading, but are nevertheless in a financially precarious position, might result in those companies being pushed into an insolvency situation which could result in further job losses. Accordingly the unit engages with employers to establish the situation on a case by case basis and seeks to recover debt on a mutually agreed basis, including setting up repayment by instalment where appropriate.

A total of €10.7 million in funds paid out of the SIF to cover redundancy related payments was recovered by the Department in 2016. Approximately 400 employers are continuing to repay debt by instalment arrangements.

The Department of Social Protection and the Revenue Commissioners have a Memorandum of Understanding which governs the exchange of all information between the two bodies, including all redundancy and insolvency scheme liaison and communication. A copy of this Memorandum of Understanding, entitled “Memorandum of Understanding on co-operation and mutual assistance between the Department of Social Protection and the Office of the Revenue Commissioners” will be forwarded to the Deputy.

The employer PAYE number provided by the Revenue Commissioners is primarily used to identify a company or business which is subject to redundancy or insolvency. The Department’s main source of information on the status of companies with debt is from the Companies

Registration Office (CRO).

The following tables give a breakdown of employer debt owed by ‘normal’ companies and sole traders/partnerships.

Table 1-Breakdown of employer debt with trading status as “normal” per CRO

Amount	Number of Employers	Total Debt
Less than €10,000	1,818	€8,267,096
€10,000 - €50,000	1,331	€29,319,633
€50,000 - €100,000	192	€13,169,947
€100,000 - €500,000	110	€19,821,468
€500,000 - €1m	1	€577,989
Greater than €1m	1	€1,079,418
Grand Total	3,453	€72,235,552

Table 2-Breakdown of employer debt of non-registered companies (eg sole traders)

Amount	Number of Employers	Total Debt
Less than €10,000	2,944	€12,264,920
€10,000 - €50,000	1,047	€20,772,037
€50,000 - €100,000	83	€5,848,422
€100,000 - €500,000	19	€2,664,881
€500,000 - €1m	0	0
Greater than €1m	0	0
Grand Total	4,093	€41,550,260

State Pensions

591. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Question No. 1,554 of 26 July 2017, her plans to amend the legislation and regulations in regard to eligibility for State pension purposes; if such provisions will be included in the forthcoming Social Welfare Bill; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [43972/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Officials in the Department are currently working on the detailed development of the ‘Total Contribution Approach’ (TCA). It is expected that the TCA will replace the yearly average approach for new pensioners from around 2020. The aim of this approach is to make the rate of contributory pension more closely match contributions made by a person. This is a very significant reform with considerable legal, administrative, and technical elements in its implementation, which will take a number of years to complete. An important element in the final design of the scheme will be the position of women who have gaps in their contribution records as a result of caring duties, and this factor is being considered very carefully in developing this reform.

Data from the independent actuarial review of the Social Insurance Fund is currently being analysed to cost options for the new approach. Following that analysis, a paper will be prepared, outlining and costing various alternatives, including, as promised, options regarding homemaker periods. My Department will then conduct a period of consultation with relevant stakeholders, providing them with information and requesting that they outline what they consider should be the priorities in this reform. After the consultation period, I will submit a proposal to Government seeking approval of the new approach. Following a Government deci-

sion, legislation will be prepared for consideration by the Oireachtas.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Youth Employment Initiative

592. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount of Youth Guarantee funding spent to date; and the amount drawn down from 2014 to 2016, inclusive, and to date in 2017. [44018/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) is one of the main EU financial resources to support the implementation of the youth guarantee by providing job, education and training opportunities to young people aged 15-25 who are not in employment, education or training. YEI funding is reserved for use in those regions, including Ireland, where youth unemployment levels exceeded 25% during the reference year of 2012. The specific YEI funding allocation for Ireland of €68m is matched by equal amounts from our European Social Fund (ESF) allocation and from the Exchequer, giving an overall allocation of €204m.

The YEI is integrated into ESF programming and is being delivered in Ireland as a dedicated priority axis within the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020. This programme is managed by the ESF Managing Authority, within the Department of Education and Skills. Seven actions were originally selected for YEI funding, namely the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance; JobBridge; JobsPlus Incentive Scheme; Tús; Youthreach, Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme and Momentum. These actions are underway and are being fully funded up-front by the Exchequer.

I am informed that while no application has been made to date to the EU Commission in respect of the YEI, it is expected that the European funding will be fully drawn down. The ESF Managing Authority and the Operational Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) maintain an ongoing overview of the funding allocations under the PEIL and re-allocate the available funding as required, in accordance with the EU Regulatory provisions. In this regard, the PMC has agreed in principle to the further inclusion of the Community Training Centres, which are funded by the ETBs in consultation with SOLAS, as an approved activity under the YEI with effect from 1 January 2017.

The ESF Regulations provide for initial pre-financing/advances of EU support at 1% (or 1.5% for Member States under financial assistance in 2014 and 2015) of the full programme support, payable for each year from 2014 to 2016, together with annual pre-financing of between 2% and 3% payable from 2016 to 2023. In May 2015 an amendment to the relevant EU Regulations resulted in an unprecedented increase in the YEI advances to be paid to Member States. The Commission subsequently released pre-financing payments from the dedicated YEI budget line, worth 30% of the YEI budget, to provide additional financial liquidity to support YEI implementation. However, the relevant Regulations specified that where a Member State did not submit an interim payment application by 23 May 2016 for at least 50% of the additional pre-financing amount, that the Member State must reimburse the Commission the total YEI pre-financing contribution. As Ireland did not submit an interim YEI payment application, the €19.8m additional pre-financing received was reimbursed to the Commission. This reimbursement has not resulted in any loss of EU monies to the Exchequer. Furthermore, as the YEI activities are fully funded up-front by the Exchequer there is no resulting reduction or delay in the funding available to them.

I understand that the ESF Authorities in the Department of Education and Skills intend to submit a payment application to the European Commission in respect of the YEI following its designation in accordance with the EU Regulatory requirements in the coming months.

My Department also obtained EU funding under the European Commission's call for proposals for preparatory actions under the Youth Guarantee Pilot, to pilot a Youth Guarantee Scheme in Ballymun which operated in 2014. The total cost of the pilot was €302,279 which included EU funding of €250,000.

Question No. 593 answered with Question No. 584.

Motor Tax

594. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason motor tax cannot be transferred from one vehicle to another when a person sells their taxed car and purchases an untaxed car; and his plans to allow persons take their car tax with them when they change vehicle. [43437/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The legal provisions governing the motor tax system are based on associations between the particular vehicle and its taxation category, which is determined by reference to factors such as engine size, CO2 emissions, vehicle weight, type of vehicle and the purposes for which the vehicle is used. Motor tax discs contain details of these criteria and are therefore vehicle specific, meaning they cannot be transferred between vehicles. There are currently no plans to change this system.

Environmental Investigations

595. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the attention of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, NPWS, has been drawn to the frequent closure of beaches by the Environmental Protection Agency, EPA, and local authorities in the past two years (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43542/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is a key statutory body for investigating complaints of pollution and for the enforcement, both directly and through oversight of local authorities, of environmental legislation in Ireland, including compliance in relation to licensed urban waste water discharges. Public notification of beach closures is generally by way of beach notices, local authority communication networks and via the national bathing water website (www.beaches.ie) operated by the EPA.

The EPA's Bathing Water Quality Report for 2016 identifies several bathing waters adjacent to urban areas as being prone to episodic pollution events and being of less than 'good' water quality status. The requirement for bathing restrictions, either as an 'advice against bathing' or a 'bathing prohibition', is determined and implemented by the relevant local authority, rather than the EPA. Such restrictions are generally put in place as a precautionary measure following elevated bacterial counts from routine sampling which indicates the potential for increased public health risk, or as a proactive warning of possible pollution e.g. in advance of predicted heavy rainfall events. The choice of restriction is based on decision criteria agreed between the EPA and the HSE.

An assessment of bathing water incidents by the EPA shows that many, in particular those affecting major urban centres around Dublin Bay, are likely to be linked to discharges from sewage outfalls, often following rainfall events. This is particularly so in the case of Loughshinny where existing wastewater infrastructure is under considerable pressure. In the cases of Merrion Strand and Sandymount Strand, investigations have shown pollution inputs from human waste contamination of surface water streams through misconnections as well as from avian and canine sources. The presence of these multiple inputs has been confirmed by genetic studies of faecal bacteria carried out by researchers at UCD. The relative proportions that each contributes is still under investigation. While seabird impacts are known to be a factor in these locations, their more general contribution to water quality in other areas is unknown.

Bathing waters are sampled at regular intervals by local authorities during the bathing season from 1 June to 15 September, in accordance with the Bathing Waters Regulations 2008. Data is reported to the EPA who coordinate its quality assessment and the communication of such assessments to the public, my Department, and the European Commission by means of the national bathing water website and through its annual bathing water report.

Housing Assistance Payment

596. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to address a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43561/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is a flexible and immediate housing support that is now available to all eligible households throughout the State. There are currently over 28,000 households in receipt of HAP, including more than 8,000 households that were previously supported by Rent Supplement and some 20,000 separate landlords and agents providing accommodation to households supported by the scheme. Unlike Rent supplement, households in receipt of HAP support can work full-time without losing their housing support.

Under HAP, a tenant sources their own accommodation, the tenancy agreement is between the tenant and the landlord and is covered by the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as amended). The Act provides that rents may not be greater than the open market rate and may only be reviewed upward or downward every 24 months unless there has been a substantial change in the nature of the accommodation that warrants a review. The requirement that the rent set is not above the market rents for similar properties applies in designated Rent Pressure Zone areas and in non-designated areas. When undertaking a rent review, the landlord must provide three examples of rents for similar properties in a comparable area to demonstrate this. Tenants must be given 90 days' notice of new rent and can make an application for dispute resolution to the Residential Tenancies Board where they feel the rent increase is in excess of the market rent.

The accommodation sourced by tenants should be within 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. Each local authority has statutory discretion to agree to a HAP payment up to 20% above the prescribed maximum rent limit in circumstances where it is necessary, because of local rental market conditions, to secure appropriate accommodation for a household that requires it. Greater enhanced support is also statutorily provided for in the Dublin Region for homeless households. It is a matter for the local authority to determine if the application of the flexibility

is warranted on a case by case basis. Local authorities must also be cognisant of the provisions of the Residential Tenancies Act when approving increases in HAP payments and advise tenants accordingly.

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 as set out in their tenancy agreement. From available data, at the end of Q.2 2017, and excluding the additional discretion available to homeless households in the Dublin Region, 12.6% of HAP households nationally were benefitting from the flexibility to exceed the rent limits. In the Kerry local authority area, 27 of the 194 households supported by HAP at that point, or 13.9% of households, were benefitting from the flexibility to exceed the rent limits.

The data available to my Department at this time indicates that the current rent limits and the flexibility to exceed those rent limits, provides local authorities with sufficient capacity to assist households in securing rented accommodation that meets their needs. 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 Services

597. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to provide compensation for private well owners, group water schemes or those who have financed their own water supply but are also required to pay for water from general taxation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43857/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water Services recommended that the principles of equity of treatment and equivalent financial support should be applied equally between households on public water supplies and those in Group Water and Sewerage Schemes, those using septic tanks and those with individual water supplies.

The Water Services Bill 2017 is currently being considered by the Oireachtas. The provisions in the Bill give effect to the recommendations of the Committee. My Department will shortly commence a review involving the National Federation of Group Water Schemes and other relevant stakeholders to advance the recommendation of the Committee in relation to the quantification of investment required to equalise treatment between those availing of domestic water services from Irish Water and those availing of private services.

Homeless Persons Data

598. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the move-ons by tenure type (details supplied) in view of his Department's press statement accompanying the August 2017 homeless figures stating that 134 families moved on from homelessness in that month. [43373/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department publishes data on a monthly basis regarding the number of homeless families,

including dependents, accommodated in all forms of emergency accommodation funded and overseen by housing authorities. Official homeless reports are published on my Department's website and can be accessed using the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>.

In addition, my Department publishes data on a quarterly basis based on the regional quarterly performance reports which sets out the numbers of households and individuals which exited homelessness into sustainable independent tenancies and the type of those tenancies. In this regard, it is worth noting that 2,060 such exits were achieved nationally in the 6 months to June 2017, a 50% increase compared to the equivalent period in 2016 when there were 1,374 such exits. In the Dublin Region alone there were 1,400 sustainable exits in the 6 months to June 2017, a 70% increase on the equivalent period in 2016 when there were 825 such exits. Separate to this, households and individuals may choose to leave emergency accommodation for a variety of reasons, such as returning to live with family or friends, but my Department does not record these 'move-ons' as sustainable exits.

Nationally, in the 6 months to June 2017, HAP related tenancies accounted for 41% of the sustainable exits, local authority lettings 22%, private rented accommodation 19% and AHB lettings/supported accommodation 18%. This level of detail is only available on a quarterly basis and not monthly as requested by the Deputy. The regional quarterly performance reports for Quarter 2 2017 will be available on my website shortly at the link quoted above.

In relation to the 134 families referred to by the Deputy, I am advised by the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive that 34 of these families exited homelessness into social housing (20 local authority and 14 Approved Housing Body homes). The remaining 100 families, who presented and were assessed as homeless during this period, were provided with Homeless HAP housing solutions.

Housing Assistance Payment Data

599. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 241 of 21 September 2017, the average monthly rent paid to landlords under the HAP scheme in each of the years since the inception of the scheme; the annualised cost of the average monthly rent paid to landlords under HAP for the local authorities in counties Dublin, Wicklow and Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43398/17]

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 Tenancies Act 2004 (as amended). There are currently more than 28,000 households having their housing need met by HAP across the State and some 20,000 separate landlords and agents currently in receipt of monthly HAP payments. The HAP scheme is funded through a combination of Exchequer monies and tenant differential rents collected in respect of HAP tenancies. Exchequer funding for the scheme increased from €57 million in 2016 to more than €152 million in 2017. This increase is in order to meet the continuing costs of existing HAP households, and the costs of supporting an additional 15,000 households this year. Budget 2018 has made an additional €149 million available for HAP next year, increasing the overall exchequer provision to more than €301 million, when an additional 17,000 households are targeted for support.

Accommodation sourced by eligible households should be within the prescribed maximum

HAP rent limits, which are based on the household size and the rental market within that area. Each local authority has statutory discretion to agree to a HAP payment up to 20% above the prescribed maximum rent limit in circumstances where it is necessary, because of local rental market conditions, to secure appropriate accommodation for a household that requires it. Additional discretion to exceed the rent limits by up to 50% is available to assist in housing homeless households in the Dublin Region. It is a matter for the local authority to determine if the application of the flexibility is warranted on a case by case basis. Local authorities must also be cognisant of the rent certainty and control provisions of the Residential Tenancies Act when approving increases in HAP payments and advise tenants accordingly.

From available data, at the end of Q.2 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. The data available to my Department at this time indicates that the current rent limits and the flexibility to exceed those rent limits, provides local authorities with sufficient capacity to assist households in securing rented accommodation that meets their needs. 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.

HAP has been in operation in South Dublin County Council since 1st October 2014 and became operational in the remaining three Dublin Areas - Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council on 1st March 2017. The Homeless Pilot of the HAP scheme has been operational since February 2015, across the four housing authorities in the Dublin Region and is being implemented through the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE). HAP became operational in Kildare County Council in November 2015 and in Wicklow County Council in December 2016.

The average monthly rent paid to landlords under the HAP scheme in each of the years since the introduction of the scheme and the annualised cost of the average monthly rent paid to landlords under HAP for the local authorities in counties Dublin, Wicklow and Kildare are set out in the following table.

Dublin local authorities (South Dublin, Dublin City, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown and Fingal County Council, inclusive of Homeless HAP in each case)

Year	Total HAP tenancies set-up	Average monthly payment paid to landlords under the HAP scheme at year end	Annualised cost* of the average monthly payment paid to landlords under the HAP scheme
2014	8	€390	€3,511
2015	626	€916	€10,992
2016	1,791	€1,192	€14,304
2017 (end Q2)	1,687	€1,269	€15,228

Kildare

Year	Total HAP tenancies set-up	Average monthly payment paid to landlords under the HAP scheme at year end	Annualised cost* of the average monthly payment paid to landlords under the HAP scheme
2015	32	€927	€11,124
2016	773	€885	€10,620
2017(end Q2)	407	€899	€10,788

Wicklow

Year	Total HAP tenancies set-up	Average monthly rent paid to landlords under the HAP scheme at year end	Annualised cost* of the average monthly rent paid to landlords under the HAP scheme
2016	3	€750	€9,000
2017 (end Q2)	173	€944	€11,328

*The annualised cost is calculated on the basis that the average cost at year end was paid every month for twelve months.

Departmental Bodies Data

600. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the State bodies or boards that fall under the remit of his Department; and the number of members of each State body or board who are not qualified within the field in which the board or body has oversight. [43418/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Details in relation to the membership of State Boards including the dates of appointment and mechanisms of appointment of members under the aegis of my Department are available on the Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/corporate/transparency-data/appointments-state-boards/appointments-declg-state-boards>.

In the case of certain appointments to State Boards, statutory selection procedures must be followed or nominations must be sought from independent nominating panels before appointments are made by the Minister or the Government, as appropriate. In addition, in the case of a number of Boards, not all of the appointments to the body concerned are made by the Minister, and in some situations appointments are made by the Minister with the consent of another Minister. Furthermore, appointments to An Bord Pleanála are of a full-time executive nature and are governed by statutory processes.

A "unitary board structure" is in place for Ervia and its subsidiaries, Irish Water and Gas Networks Ireland. An overarching non-executive board has overall responsibility and accountability for the performance of the Ervia Group. The Boards of the two principal Ervia subsidiaries, Irish Water and Gas Networks Ireland, are executive-only boards.

The Public Appointments Service portal www.stateboards.ie offers a single dedicated point

of contact to all Government Departments, as a support to the existing State Board appointment procedures. This service provides a mechanism for Departments to advertise board vacancies and it gives prospective candidates an opportunity to register their general interest in a position on a State Board and to be alerted to upcoming vacancies. This process for appointments to State Boards includes an assessment of the skills and competencies required to be a member of the relevant Board.

Planning Issues

601. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason elected members who have the authority to adopt the county development plan and bring it into effect do not have the authority to make variations to the plan. [43519/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The relevant provisions setting out the procedure to initiate a variation to a City or County Development Plan or a Local Area Plan are set out in the Planning Acts.

Recognising the different roles of both elected members and officials, planning and local government legislation distinguishes between legal functions reserved to the elected members on the one hand, and executive functions on the other, both being part of the planning authority.

Section 13 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) sets out the legislative basis for varying a Development Plan. With regard to the initiation of a variation to a development plan, Section 13(1) states:

A planning authority may at any time, for stated reasons, decide to make a variation of a development plan which for the time being is in force.

The administrative steps associated with formally initiating the variation process, such as placing advertisements, writing to prescribed bodies notifying them of the commencement of the variation process as set out under sections 13(1)-(4) are executive powers of the officials, as no Council resolution is required to invoke these sections.

However, the elected members are the decision-makers at an overall policy level, once presented with the aspects of the plan to be varied. For example, subsection 13(6) allocates specific powers for elected members to consider reports and recommendations of the Chief Executive and to subsequently decide whether or not to vary the development plan.

While elected members are not empowered to direct the Chief Executive to initiate a variation to a Development Plan, they may at any time request their officials to consider the initiation of a review, which the executive would normally respond to by way of a formal report to the Council on the merits or otherwise of the relevant proposal and the practical aspects of same.

My Department is currently reviewing and updating its Planning Guidelines on Development Plans and will be incorporating and clarifying the plan variation process in the revised draft with a view to publication for public consultation later in the Autumn.

Unfinished Housing Developments Data

602. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the 430 housing estates that remain unfinished, by county; the estimated number of occupied houses or persons living in these unfinished estates; and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [43676/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): 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, with 248 developments resolved in 2016 alone.

Funding of the resolution process is now centred around investment by housing providers and their funders as well as income from bonds and securities.

Of the 420 remaining estates, 34.8% of these are occupied. All information on the remaining unfinished housing estates (including a list of the names of all 420 estates and a breakdown of the figures by county and by occupancy rates) is available on my Department’s website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/unfinished-housing-developments/national-housing-development-survey/unfinished-housing>.

The 2016 Annual Progress 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.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

603. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 629 of 3 October 2017, the details of the affordable rental scheme, including the definition of “affordable” used; the way in which the scheme is to be administered; the way in which interested persons can apply to the scheme; and the way in which this scheme differs from the affordable rental available by way of a Dublin City Council tenancy paying a differential rent. [43775/17]

604. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 629 of 3 October 2017, if the affordable scheme includes affordable purchase homes for persons looking to buy as only affordable rental is referenced. [43776/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 603 and 604 together.

The issue of housing affordability has been examined, as part of the Review of Rebuilding Ireland, in consultation with Dublin City Council, other local authorities and relevant stakeholders. The review is now largely complete and I expect to be in a position to announce details of the outcome in the coming weeks.

With regard to the Poolbeg Strategic Development Zone specifically, it is intended that, of the 3,500 new homes permissible on the site under its Planning Scheme, 900 will be delivered as social and affordable units. Of the 900 units referred to, 350 (10%) will be delivered as social housing in accordance with the provisions of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

It is also intended that a commercial agreement, with confirmed funding, will be entered into prior to commencement of development, between Dublin City Council, my Department and the owners/developers of the residential element of the overall SDZ area, for a further 550 new homes, the majority of which could be either for affordable rental or affordable purchase, with the balance of the 550 provided as social housing with a particular focus on housing for older people.

The specific arrangements will be confirmed when the commercial agreement is finalised by Dublin City Council, taking account of affordable housing policy. The final tenure mix and other arrangements will be the subject of careful consideration by Dublin City Council, the elected members included, in due course.

Local Authority Boundaries

605. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will consider the views of the Cork public regarding proposed changes in the boundaries of Cork city and county councils. [43795/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): Cork County Council has initiated a proposal for alteration of the boundary under Part V of the Local Government Act 1991. As this proposal is the subject of a statutory process which may lead to an application for Ministerial decision, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the matter.

Housing Assistance Payment Administration

606. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if there are circumstances in which a landlord's payment from the local authority in respect of rent due can be withheld, totally or partially, in the event of the tenant not paying their weekly rent contribution to the local authority in respect of HAP. [43803/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme is a flexible and immediate housing support that is now available to all eligible households throughout the State. There are currently more than 28,000 households having their housing needs met via HAP and some 20,000 separate landlords and agents currently in receipt of HAP payments. A weekly average of 348 HAP tenancies have been set-up during 2017.

HAP is a form of social housing support under which local authorities will make monthly payments on behalf of tenants directly to landlords in respect of rent, subject to the terms and conditions of the scheme. All the terms and conditions of the HAP scheme for both tenants and landlords are available on the dedicated HAP website, www.hap.ie, and associated HAP documentation.

HAP tenants are required to sign a rent contribution agreement to pay a weekly rental contribution to the local authority in line with the local authority's differential rent scheme. As set out in the rent contribution agreement, this weekly rental contribution must be paid by them so that they remain eligible for the HAP scheme. HAP recipients are required to set up automatic electronic rent payment arrangements.

The HAP Shared Service Centre (SSC) manages the collection of all HAP tenants' differen-

tial rents, on behalf of the relevant local authority, and the payment of all HAP rents to landlords on behalf of tenants supported by the HAP scheme. The HAP SSC applies a very clear communication policy if rental arrears issues arise. This policy includes regular and early written communication with tenants, landlords and the relevant local authority.

Outside the formal notification letters there would always be attempts to contact the tenants by phone and by email to settle accounts and avoid escalation of the debt process. Depending on the activity of arrears in question, both the relevant local authority and the landlord are informed when an account has not been cleared and of possible suspension and/or cessation of the HAP payment. However, in the vast majority of cases a payment plan to deal with the arrears is agreed between the tenant and the local authority, before there is any necessity to advise the landlord.

If the tenant does not contact their local authority or does not enter into a payment arrangement within 8 weeks of the arrears commencing, both the landlord and the tenant are informed that the HAP payment may be ceased. To date the approach has been very effective with minimal levels of rent arrears arising for HAP tenants. In 2016, when 12,075 additional households were supported by HAP, the scheme had a 99% differential rent collection rate, with minimal arrears arising for tenants or local authorities. Therefore, a very small number of tenants have fallen in to difficulty with their differential rent. In 99.7% of cases where the tenant has had difficulty, this has been resolved with their local authority without any impact on the landlord's payment. Therefore the likelihood of a HAP payment to a landlord being suspended or stopped is very small and occurs in only a very limited number of cases.

My Department continues to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review. In general, I am satisfied with the operation of the HAP scheme and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

Departmental Schemes

607. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his Department's new HAP tenancy targets for 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021, respectively, in tabular form. [43833/17]

608. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his Department's new RAS tenancy targets for 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021, respectively, in tabular form. [43834/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 608 and 607 together.

The Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) is a social housing support introduced to cater for the accommodation needs of persons who are in receipt of long-term rent supplement. In general, households with a housing need who are in receipt of rent supplement for more than 18 months are considered for RAS.

RAS remains a significant part of the suite of social housing options available to local authorities and to those who are assessed as being in need of housing support. 618 of the 1,000 new RAS transfers targeted under Rebuilding Ireland in 2017, had been completed by end of August 2017. With the introduction of HAP to all local authority areas, the availability of Rent Supplement has changed and is generally no longer available to households with a long-term housing need. This change reduces significantly the numbers of households entering rent sup-

plement support. Equally, as the transfers of existing rent supplement recipients with a housing need to HAP accelerates, the numbers of long term rent supplement recipients eligible for RAS will decline as will RAS transfers.

The following table sets out the annual target for the number of additional households to be transferred from Rent Supplement into new RAS tenancies as set out in Rebuilding Ireland and the annual targets for additional households to receive HAP support in each of those years.

	2018	2019	2020	2021
RAS	600	600	600	0
HAP	17,000	16,760	13,000*	10,000

* The ambition is to complete the transfers of eligible households from Rent Supplement to HAP by 2020

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

609. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the delivery of and targets for delivery of social housing owned by local authorities and approved housing bodies, properties leased under the SHCEP programme and properties leased under RAS and HAP programmes for each year covered by Rebuilding Ireland, for example, 2016 to 2021. [43835/17]

624. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will provide a breakdown of the 40,000 real social housing units to be delivered under Rebuilding Ireland by categories (details supplied), in tabular form. [43992/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 609 and 624 together.

Following the first phase of my review of Rebuilding Ireland and with the provision made under Budget 2018 for social housing delivery, there is now a greater emphasis on direct build activity by local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs). The following table sets out the targets in respect of social housing under the main programme areas for each year of Rebuilding Ireland.

Year		Build	Acquisition	Leasing	RAS	HAP
2016	Target	2,260	1,755	225	1,000	12,000
2016	Delivered	2,965	1,957	792	1,256	12,075
2017	Target	3,200	1,250	600	1,000	15,000
2018	Target	4,969	900	2,000	600	17,000
2019	Target	6,385	1,025	2,130	600	16,760
2020	Target	7,716	800	2,631	600	13,000
2021	Target	8,907	800	2,450	-	10,000

In terms of the specific categories of delivery referred to by the Deputy, the following table shows the elements of the build activity of almost 33,500 social housing homes, including homes that will be built directly by local authorities and AHBs, as well as properties constructed for social housing through Part V and refurbished properties/Voids, together with some 6,500 acquisitions, over the period 2016 to 2021.

Delivery	Build	Acquisition
Local Authority	16,328	1,480
AHB	8,960	5,050
Refurbished properties/ Voids	3,459	-
Properties constructed for social housing through Part V	4,690	-
Total	33,437	6,530

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

610. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of houses to be delivered in each of the 18 sites for which LIHAF contracts have been signed; and the number of houses on each site that will be sold at price bands (details supplied). [43836/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): 34 projects, at a total cost of €226 million, received preliminary approval for funding under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF) and these have the potential to provide an estimated 23,000 new homes across the country by 2021. Local authorities were allowed to proceed to design phase on all of the projects, pending final approval and sign-off of a grant agreement between the Department and Local Authorities.

I have already given final approval for the first tranche of 22 of the 34 infrastructure projects which will activate supply of approximately 11,880 housing units. Grant agreements in respect of those projects have been signed.

It is estimated that of the 11,880 housing units, approx 2,200 will be social housing units made up of Part V units and additional social housing being provided on the 11 State-owned sites that are benefiting from the LIHAF-funded enabling infrastructure, as well as producing some affordable housing for sale or rent.

As required under the scheme criteria and conditions, there is an agreed cost reduction or a related affordability scheme included in the agreements on all of the approved sites to ensure that there is a proportionate dividend for the State's investment in infrastructure, as demonstrated by a proportionate reduction in house prices either across all of the homes being facilitated or a specified number of homes which will benefit from a larger price reduction. Based on the information provided by the local authorities in their agreements and analysis of current house prices in the areas concerned, and recognising the commercial sensitivity around some of the details in the agreements reached, the approved projects outside Dublin are likely to have new homes for sale towards the lower end of the bands identified by the Deputy, while the projects in Dublin are likely to have starter homes available towards the middle and upper end of these bands.

In relation to the 22 sites for which grant agreements have been signed, the number of houses to be delivered on each site is set out in the following table.

I expect to be in a position to consider and approve the remaining projects shortly and further summary information in relation to all LIHAF funded projects will be made available on my Department's website at that stage.

Table: Approved Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund projects.

Local Authority	Project name	Total cost €	Housing delivery by 2021
Cork City	Old Whitechurch Road	9.89	600
Cork County	Midleton (Water-rock)	6.50	520
Cork County	Glanmire	5.90	300
Cork County	Carrigaline	0.6	400
Dublin City	Dodder Bridge	15.75	1,500
Fingal	Donabate Distributor Road	15.50	1,200
Fingal	Oldtown Mooretown	4.90	800
Fingal	Baldoyle Stapolin	6.18	500
Kildare	Sallins	0.93	250
Kildare	Naas	6.00	800
Kilkenny	Ferrybank	0.62	200
Kilkenny	Western Environs	6.76	530
Limerick	Mungret	10.50	400
Louth	Newtown Drogheda	1.22	200
Louth	Mount Avenue Dundalk	3.33	212
Meath	Ratoath	3.15	266
Meath	Farganstown, Navan	5.68	400
South Dublin	Kilcarbery / Corkagh Grange	4.39	1,000
South Dublin	Clonburris SDZ	3.00	1,000
Waterford City and County Council	Gracedieu	1.32	200
Waterford City and County Council	Kilbarry	3.39	400
Westmeath	Brawny Road, Athlone	1.83	202
TOTAL		117.34	11,880

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

611. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the mechanisms available to local authorities to ensure the provision of affordable homes on public or private lands including those included in the four land initiative schemes in Dublin city and county, the strategic development zones in Clonburris and other land on which councils, approved housing bodies or private developers plan to develop affordable housing. [43837/17]

612. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the definition of “affordable housing” in terms of household income and purchase price of properties. [43838/17]

618. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans regarding affordable housing; his further plans to reintroduce the scheme which was abolished in 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43873/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 611, 612 and 618 together.

Housing affordability for individual households is a unique function of, inter alia, income, prevailing market prices and rents in different locations, as well as access to funding and finance. While there is no universally ideal price/rent-to-income ratio or minimum residual income requirement, there is broad agreement that households, particularly low- to moderate-income households, should be spending no more than one third of their net income on housing costs over the longer term.

The development of the State land bank for housing is a key Government objective and to this end, the Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map was published on 27 April 2017 and is available at <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-land-map/>. Local authorities and the Housing Agency are now finalising Development Management Plans for their sites.

The final development model for each site, including the tenure mix, will be the subject of careful consideration by the local authority concerned, including its elected members. The development of many sites for social and affordable housing is already underway. For example, the Dublin local authorities are well advanced in bringing large-scale sites forward for mixed-tenure housing, with projects advancing that can deliver around 3,000 mixed-tenure homes in the Dublin City Council and South Dublin County Council areas alone and other sites planned.

Funding for 34 projects under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF), at a cost of €226 million, will be key to the delivery of more than 20,000 new homes over the next four years. There will be homes available at below €320,000 on 70% of the sites being opened up through this enabling infrastructure. South Dublin County Council has approval for three projects at Adamstown, Kilcarbery, and Clonburris, respectively. The total cost of these projects is €27.4 million, of which €20.5 million will be funded by my Department, and €6.9 million by South Dublin County Council. These projects are expected to facilitate the delivery of 3,000 homes by 2021 and have the potential to support 11,500 housing units in the longer term, once the sites are fully built out.

As I have previously signalled, the Government recognises the housing affordability pressures faced by many households, particularly in certain parts of the country, and as such housing affordability has been examined across a range of interconnected policy areas in the context of the ongoing focused review of Rebuilding Ireland. A number of new and enhanced actions in this area have already been announced and I expect to make further announcements in the coming weeks as this work is finalised.

New measures introduced to date, to enable the provision of affordable homes, to buy or rent, include:

- Planning reforms, such as the fast-track planning approval process for developments of scale with over 4,000 homes worth of applications submitted to An Bord Pleanála;
- Reduced and reformed development contributions;
- Rent caps in specific Rent Pressure Zones; and
- Amendments to apartment planning guidelines to allow for more cost-effective and affordable apartment development for our city centres.

On 10 October, as part of Budget 2018, I announced an additional €75 million in Exchequer funding for new affordable housing initiatives.

Firstly, there will be a second LIHAF fund of €50 million to unlock even more sites, more quickly, and at affordable prices. Secondly, I'm introducing a new fund of €25 million, to be provided over 2018 and 2019, aimed at unlocking local authority-owned land specifically in order to deliver affordable housing on those sites. My Department is currently drawing up the criteria for access to this scheme, to be announced in the coming weeks, along with further affordability measures.

In terms of residential land more broadly, the combination of the capital gains change and the more than doubling of the vacant site levy to 7%, as signalled in Budget 2018, will help to address the issue of land hoarding and to release more land for residential development.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

613. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the expected draw down of LIHAF funds in 2017; the expected carryover of unspent LIHAF funds from 2017 to 2018; the LIHAF allocation for 2018 including carryover; and the way in which the €50 million announced for the second LIHAF call related to the initial announcement of the €226 million LIHAF announced in 2016. [43839/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The total cost of the 34 projects approved under the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund is €226 million, of which 75% (€169.5 million) will be funded by my Department, with local authorities funding their 25% share (€56.5 million).

This funding is ring-fenced within the overall housing budget and will be available for local authorities to drawdown over the lifetime of the projects. The total allocation for 2017 is €50m but given that most projects are at design phase there will be an underspend on LIHAF this year. However, any underspends in one year will be made good in future years and, through proactive management of the broader housing programme, any such underspends can be applied to other housing activities in the year in question, ensuring that the funding available in any given year is fully applied.

The first drawdown for LIHAF projects is likely to occur in late November and actual draw-down figures will be available by the end of the year. The allocation under LIHAF for 2018 is €60 million.

The €50m, as announced as part of Budget 2018, is additional funding which will separately be available for a second call under LIHAF and will again be subject to matching funding at 25% by Local Authorities. This will allow us to build more infrastructure to unlock further sites and activate more housing supply. A further call for proposals under LIHAF is likely early in 2018.

Housing Data

614. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of Part V units purchased with funding from his Department in the past 12 months by local authority area; the average price paid for these units in each local authority area; the maximum price paid for any Part V unit in each local authority area; and the number

of properties purchased in each local authority area at a price above the average for that local authority area in the past 12 months, in tabular form. [43840/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department supports local authorities and approved housing bodies to acquire new social homes through the Part V mechanism through the provision of capital assistance under the Social Housing Capital Investment Programme (SHCIP), Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) and also through the long-term leasing of properties under the Social Housing Current Expenditure programme (SHCEP). As such, there is no one dedicated funding scheme for Part V units and the Department does not record information in the manner requested.

Some housing developments completed in 2016/2017 were subject to older Part V agreements made before 1 September 2015, when other options - such as a financial contribution, the provision of fully or partially serviced sites or the provision of land elsewhere in the functional area of the planning authority - were available. This means that properties currently being obtained via Part V may originate from either developments under old permissions and agreements or through agreements under the new legislative provision and accordingly, costs differ and an average cost would not be indicative.

Details on the number of social housing properties constructed, purchased and leased by local authorities and approved housing bodies, for letting to those on their social housing waiting lists, are published on my Department's website at the following link: www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision. Information in respect of most areas of social housing is available up to quarter two of 2017, while specific data relating to social housing delivery under the Part V arrangements is available up to end 2016.

Planning Issues

615. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the limits of the exempted development area for roof mounted solar panels, including photovoltaics, will be raised in order to increase Ireland's response to climate change mitigation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43847/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, all development, unless specifically exempted under the Act or associated Regulations, requires planning permission.

Section 4 of the Act and Schedule 2 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended, set out various exemptions from the requirement to obtain planning permission. Any such exemptions are subject to compliance with any general restrictions on exemptions set out in the Act or the Regulations and to the specific conditions set out in each class of exempted development in Schedule 2 of the Regulations.

With regard to exemptions for solar panels, Class 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 2 of the Regulations provides an exemption for "the installation or erection of a solar panel on, or within the curtilage of a house or any buildings within the curtilage of a house", subject to certain siting and size conditions.

Class 56 of Part 1 of Schedule 2 of the Regulations provides an exemption for "the installation or erection on or within the curtilage of an industrial building, or any ancillary buildings within the curtilage of an industrial building, of solar panels (thermal collector or photovoltaic)", subject to specific conditions.

Furthermore, Class 18 of Part 3 of Schedule 2 of the Regulations provides an exemption for “the installation or erection on an agricultural structure, or within the curtilage of an agricultural holding, of solar panels (thermal collector or photo-voltaic)”, again subject to a number of conditions.

Exemptions from the requirement to obtain planning permission in respect of specific forms of development are provided for, when they are considered to be consistent with proper planning and sustainable development.

These exemptions provided for in the Planning and Development Regulations are kept under regular review, in consultation with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment.

Budget Measures

616. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of the €15 million allocation in budget 2018 for infrastructure and services on local authority owned sites; the way in which this funding can be applied for; if it can be incorporated into land initiative projects; and if there is a target number of affordable units to be delivered in 2018 and 2019 under this fund. [43869/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): On 10 October, as part of Budget 2018, I announced an additional €75 million in Exchequer funding for new affordable housing initiatives. A second LIHAF infrastructure fund of €50 million will unlock even more sites, more quickly and at affordable prices. The first LIHAF was well over-subscribed, so it is expected that the second LIHAF call will be answered very quickly.

Recognising the significant challenge households face in securing affordable housing in parts of the country a new fund of €25 million will be provided, over 2018 and 2019, to unlock local authority-owned land specifically to deliver affordable housing. Local authorities have already worked very successfully with co-operative housing bodies in delivering infrastructure on local authority-owned sites so that co-operatives can make affordable housing available. I would like to see this model made available on a much greater scale.

My Department is currently drawing up the criteria for access to this scheme, to be announced in the coming weeks, along with further affordability measures.

Departmental Surveys

617. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the publication date for the residential land availability survey 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43872/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department intends to conduct a new strategic national analysis of the extent of residentially zoned land next year to update and expand upon the previous 2014 survey of the extent of lands zoned for housing in statutory development plans and local area plans set out in the table.

	Serviced & unserviced residentially zoned lands (ha)	Housing potential(units)	Est. housing land supply (in years)

National	17,434	414,712	16
Dublin	2,654	116,705	11+

Given the focus of housing demand pressures in recent years, particularly in the Greater Dublin Area, and taking account of newer sources of information such as the quarterly Dublin Housing Supply and Co-ordination Task Force reports, providing summaries of lands both zoned and with planning permission in place for housing, it was not deemed necessary to conduct national surveys annually.

However, in light of the wider recovery now underway in the housing supply sector and the intended finalisation of the National Planning Framework, Ireland 2040: Our Plan, later this year, my Department intends to put in place new monitoring systems to support its implementation so as to ensure that the appropriate quantum of zoned and serviced lands is available in the relevant locations to meet strategic development requirements and that the necessary land management and infrastructure delivery arrangements are in place and functional to drive planned development.

Such monitoring systems will also be required in connection with the preparation of the three Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies to be adopted by the end of 2018 which will further develop the national planning policies set out in the NPF for a regionally co-ordinated approach to local authority development plans, including their provision of lands for future housing development purposes.

Accordingly, a strategic assessment of lands for housing development purposes will be progressed in the first half of 2018.

Question No. 618 answered with Question No. 611.

Housing Policy

619. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of meetings of the Rebuilding Ireland project oversight group he has held since coming into office. [43932/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Since the publication of Rebuilding Ireland, the Government's attention has been firmly focused on delivery. Implementation of Rebuilding Ireland is being advanced across a number of Departments, under the oversight of the Cabinet Committee on Infrastructure, Housing, and Climate Change, chaired by An Taoiseach.

Within my own Department, a group of senior officials, chaired by the Secretary General, monitors progress on a regular and ongoing basis. Working Group structures under each of the Action Plan's five Pillars have also been put in place. In addition, to ensure broader consultation and engagement with delivery agents and stakeholders on implementation progress and emerging issues, an Oversight Group and a Project Board have been established. The Oversight Group met on 30 November 2016 and 22 February 2017 and the Project Board has met on 14 December 2016 and 25 February 2017.

Since taking up Office, I have met with all housing stakeholders to discuss their views of the ongoing implementation of Rebuilding Ireland and further actions to be considered as part of the one-year review of the Action Plan, which is largely concluded. Future meetings under the formal governance structures of Rebuilding Ireland will be arranged in the coming weeks, once the work on the Review has concluded.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

620. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of units delivered through SHCEP in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the target number to be delivered for each year from 2018 to 2021; the number of these units each year that will remain in private ownership, council ownership and ownership of an approved housing body; and the cumulative annual cost of servicing these leases for each year from 2014 to 2021. [43957/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP), administered by my Department, provides funding to local authorities to support the on-going contractual costs of long term leases for housing units that are made available for social housing. These contractual arrangements - up to 30 years in duration - can be entered into with approved housing bodies (AHBs) in respect of properties which are owned, leased, constructed or purchased by those organisations or with private owners of property.

To the end of September 2017, the number of operational units under SHCEP is 9,414. The total output under SHCEP in each of the years 2014 to 2016, and to date in 2017, is set out in the following table. Details of the output of social housing units under SHCEP is 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>.

YEAR	Total SHCEP Output
2014	1,065
2015	1,477
2016	1,358
2017 to end Q3	1,205

In total, it is estimated that an additional 21,100 units will be incrementally supported under SHCEP in the period 2018 to 2021. This includes an estimated 3,350 units to be sourced through the Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS), over 8,000 units under long-term lease arrangements from a range of different sources and 9,610 properties which will be delivered by AHBs through a combination of the support under my Department's Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) and private borrowings, including from the Housing Finance Agency (HFA). Properties sourced by local authorities and AHBs under long term lease arrangements, including RLS, are likely to be owned by private property owners at the end of the lease term. Properties constructed or acquired by AHBs are likely to remain in the ownership of AHBs.

The annual number of units set to be funded under SCHEP in each of the years 2018 - 2021 are set out in the following table, as well as the specific delivery streams, which include construction, acquisition and leasing activity.

SHCEP delivery stream	2018	2019	2020	2021
AHB Build & Acquisition units secured under availability agreements	1,800	2,088	2,617	3,105

SHCEP delivery stream	2018	2019	2020	2021
Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) units from private owners	800	950	950	650
Longterm leasing from private owners	460	780	881	1020
Longerm leasing from NTMA/ISIF Special Purpose Vehicle	1,000	1,000	1,500	1,500
Total units to be funded under SHCEP	4,060	4,818	5,948	6,275

The annual cost of SHCEP to the Exchequer is made up of the continuing cost of supporting existing tenancies and contracts in place at the end of the previous year together with the additional cost of the new tenancies and contracts supported over the course of the year to which the allocation relates. The cost of the schemes in future years is therefore dependent on the number of housing units falling to be funded within the scheme and the lease payments involved. Exchequer funding for SHCEP in 2017 is €84m and an allocation of €115m has been secured for 2018 – an increase of €31m. The allocations for SHCEP from 2019 to 2021 will form part of the annual Estimates processes. Details of the funding drawn-down by local authorities under SHCEP in 2014, 2015 and 2016 are provided in the following table.

SHCEP Expenditure	Total
2014	€34,844,780
2015	€42,275,724*
2016	€54,028,752

*Of this figure, a total of €7,933,651 was self-funded by local authorities using funding from their RAS Reserve.

Residential Tenancies Board

621. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if the suspension of the Residential Tenancies Board's allocations to local authorities for inspections of rental accommodation continued into 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43981/17]

622. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the ringfenced budget 2018 funding for inspections of rental accommodation in 2018 as committed in the rental strategy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43982/17]

623. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the shared service for inspections by local authorities of privately rented accommodation promised in the Rebuilding Ireland strategy; the overall responsibility

for management, oversight and delivery of all aspects of the inspections process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43983/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 621 to 623, inclusive, together.

Section 176 of the Residential Tenancies Act provides that the fees received by the Residential Tenancies Board under the Act shall be paid into, or disposed of for the benefit of, the Exchequer in such manner as I may direct. By various Ministerial Directions since 2005, a percentage of fees received by the RTB under the Act has been allocated for transfer to local authorities for the purpose of the performance of their functions under the Housing Acts in relation to private rented accommodation, including rental standards inspections.

Since 1 July 2016, the RTB retains the entirety of the fees received under the Act to defray its costs. The RTB is in a position to continue the support for local authority inspections of rental accommodation until the end of 2017, using surpluses accumulated in the allocations for local authorities over previous years.

In December 2016, the Strategy for the Rental Sector, one of the key measures promised under Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homeless, was published. The Strategy sets out a range of measures under the headings of Security, Supply, Standards and Services to address both immediate and long-term issues affecting the supply, cost, accessibility and quality of rental accommodation.

Action 22 of the Strategy commits to developing a more efficient and effective approach to inspections, through a shared services type model, to increase efficiency, transparency and standardisation in inspection and enforcement across all local authority areas.

To this end, my Department has established a working group, in conjunction with the County and City Management Association, Local Authorities and the RTB, to examine and develop the most appropriate approach to achieve this aim. The Group is developing proposals for a system of shared support services for the standards inspections and enforcement functions for the 31 local authorities, in areas including ICT, legal services, capacity development and resource and performance management.

Additional funding is being made available to support local authorities' inspections and increase the numbers of private rental properties being inspected, with detailed funding arrangements for 2018 to be announced in due course. The Strategy for the Rental Sector sets the objective to increase inspection numbers incrementally each year with the aim of achieving a 25% annual inspection coverage rate by 2021. To achieve this, annual targets for both inspection and compliance will be agreed with local authorities.

Question No. 624 answered with Question No. 609.

Rental Accommodation Standards

625. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if SI 17 of 2017 Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) applies to management companies of apartment blocks; the standard a suitable fire detection and alarm system must conform to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44026/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): All properties let, or available to let, must comply with the Housing (Standards for Rented

Houses) Regulations. All landlords have a legal obligation to ensure that their rented properties comply with the Regulations, including management companies where they are also landlords. Responsibility for enforcement of the Regulations rests with the relevant local authority.

Following enactment of 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 from €250 to €400.

On 1 July 2017, the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2017 came into operation with new requirements focusing on tenant safety, including new measures covering heating appliances, carbon monoxide and window safety.

Article 10 of the Regulations sets out the Fire Safety requirements, specifically:

“10. (1) Each house shall contain a suitable self-contained fire detection and alarm system.

(2) Each house shall contain a suitably located fire blanket.

(3) Each self-contained house in a multi-unit building shall contain a suitable fire detection and alarm system and an emergency evacuation plan.

(4) A suitable fire detection and alarm system shall be provided in common areas within a multi-unit building.

(5) Emergency lighting shall be provided in all common areas within a multiunit building.

(6) Fire detection and alarm systems and emergency lighting systems required under Regulation 10(4) and 10(5) shall be maintained in accordance with current standards.

(7) In this Regulation:

“current standards” means standards produced by the National Standards Authority of Ireland for Fire Detection and Fire Alarm Systems in Buildings and for Emergency Lighting;”

To complement this, my Department published a detailed guidance document in August 2017 to assist local authorities with implementation of these Regulations, including details that will assist landlords in demonstrating compliance with each aspect of the Regulations, including fire safety. The guidelines can be found at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/private-rented-housing/minimum-standards/guidelines-housing-authorities-minimum-standards>.

Motor Tax

626. **Deputy Maria Bailey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the authority or organisation that makes the decision on the classification with regard to motor tax (details supplied) in relation to used or already registered private motor vehicles. [44068/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

Private motor vehicles are classified for purposes of motor tax based on the information contained in the Vehicle Registration Certificate (VRC). This certificate is issued by the Office of the Revenue Commissioners when the Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) has been paid and is based on the information contained in the Certificate of Conformity provided by the vehicle manufacturer which sets out factors such as engine size, CO2 emissions, vehicle weight, type of vehicle.

Motor tax for private (used/already registered) vehicles is based on the construction and use of a vehicle. Individual tax bands are based on either the engine size (c.c.) of the vehicle or the CO2 emissions as detailed in the Vehicle Registration Certificate. Lead policy responsibility in relation to the setting of motor tax rates rests with me as Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Naval Service Promotions

627. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason the case made by an organisation (details supplied) to have a suitably qualified member of the Naval Service Reserve commissioned to the rank of ensign has not been resolved in view of the fact that the matter was initially raised in June 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43567/17]

628. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason the case made by an organisation (details supplied) to have a suitably qualified member of the Naval Service Reserve commissioned to the rank of ensign has not been resolved in view of the fact that this matter was initially raised in May 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43568/17]

629. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason the military authorities refused to commission a person in 2014 to the rank of ensign for which they were suitably qualified (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43569/17]

630. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason the military authorities are now rejecting the findings of a medical officer by re-classifying a Naval Service Reserve as medically unfit to be commissioned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43570/17]

631. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason a member of the Naval Service Reserve that is suitably qualified for commissioning to the rank of ensign cannot be reimbursed the cost of their Naval Service officer's dress uniform (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43571/17]

632. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will meet with members of an organisation (details supplied) at least once a year as agreed on 12 July 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43572/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 627 to 632, inclusive, together.

I am informed by the military authorities that the individual referred to by the Deputy does not meet the medical standard required for military service at the rank of commissioned officer in the Naval Service Reserve, due to a medical condition. The Naval Service have re-iterated that the individual's medical condition is incompatible with service at sea, especially in the

military environment.

I am informed that a request for a medical derogation was made in 2015. The Deputy Chief of Staff (Support) considered the case and received the opinions of both the Director of Legal Services and Director of the Medical Branch. The Deputy Chief of Staff (Support) decided that a medical derogation could not be granted.

With regard to the reimbursement of a Naval Service Commissioned Officer's Dress Uniform, I have sought additional information and I will revert to the Deputy when this information is to hand.

Finally, I am meeting members of RDFRA this Thursday (19 October 2017) and I look forward to having a positive discussion with them on matters of importance to their members.

Air Corps Recruitment

633. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if there will be a general service recruitment campaign for the Air Corps launched before the year end; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43911/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Government is committed to maintaining the establishment of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500 personnel, comprising of 7,520 Army, 886 Air Corps and 1,094 Naval Service as stated in the 2015 White Paper on Defence.

The manpower requirements of the Permanent Defence Force are monitored on an ongoing basis in accordance with the operational requirements of the three services. Personnel are posted on the basis of operational need across the organisation both at home and abroad. As there is a significant turnover of personnel in the Defence Forces, targeted recruitment takes place on a regular basis so as to maintain personnel numbers at or near the agreed strength levels.

The Defence Forces do not run a general service campaign specifically for the Air Corps. The Air Corps induct personnel through a series of competitions including Cadetships, Air Corps Trainee Military Aircraft Technicians and through transfer of personnel from general service in the Army. In this regard, 12 General Service Recruits enlisted in March 2017, have passed their training, and will now be posted to units in the Air Corps. A further 11 general service recruits enlisted in October 2017 have commenced basic training alongside the Trainee Military Aircraft Technicians inducted in the same month. It is expected that these recruits will also be assigned to Air Corps units on completion of their training.

On 13 March 2017, a class of 11 Trainee Military Aircraft Technicians began their training. This was augmented by an additional 11 Trainee Military Aircraft Technicians who joined in October 2017.

With the support of the Chief of Staff, it is intended to continue to recruit new personnel in order to ensure that the Defence Forces retain the capacity to operate effectively across all roles and to undertake the tasks laid down by Government, both at home and overseas.