

## Written Answers.

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

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*Questions Nos. 1 to 16, inclusive, answered orally.*

*Questions Nos. 17 to 27, inclusive, resubmitted.*

*Questions Nos. 28 to 33, inclusive, answered orally.*

### **Defence Forces Training**

34. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on the training exercise which recently took place in Sweden and the outcomes from this training in respect of a new air defence system; the cost of the system; the threats against which this system is directed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44047/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The Defence Forces attended a live firing practice of the RBS 70 surface to air missile system in Karlskoga, Sweden in May 2017. The main purpose of the live firing shoot, which involved the firing of Defence Forces RBS 70 missiles, was to validate the training and capability of on island Ground Based Air Defence training.

These RBS 70 missiles cannot be test fired on island due to firing range restrictions. Participation in live firing practices adds to the Defence Forces capability in the area of Air Defence by practicing crews in live firing that is not possible to conduct at home.

The live firing practice also had associated benefits in providing a nucleus of experienced personnel that can be employed in operations and pass on the benefit of this experience in the training environment.

The RBS 70 Surface to Air Missile System constitutes the principal element of the Defence Forces Ground Based Air Defence capability. A major upgrade of the system was completed in 2016 to allow it to meet current and future capability requirements.

The upgrade, which was carried out by the original equipment manufacturer SAAB Dynamics AB, Sweden at a cost of €4.1m ex VAT will ensure that the system will remain as a state of the art Ground Based Air Defence System into the future.

The investment in the RBS 70 system is designed to counter threats in the air such as from unmanned aerial vehicles and aircraft.

There are currently no plans to procure a new Ground Based Air Defence System for the

Defence Forces. However, the White Paper on Defence 2015 sets out that the Army will continue to retain all-arms conventional military capabilities, and the principal aim over the period of the White Paper will be to replace and upgrade, as required, existing capabilities in order to retain a flexible response for a wide range of operational requirements both at home and overseas.

In the event of additional funding becoming available beyond that required to maintain existing capabilities, additional air defence capabilities, such as ground to air weapons systems and ground to air radar surveillance systems are among the priorities identified. In this regard, equipment priorities for the Defence Forces are being considered in the context of the lifetime of the White Paper on Defence as part of the capability development and equipment planning process.

I am satisfied that the current provisions, together with the courses of action in the White Paper, will continue to ensure that the Defence Forces is suitably equipped, in line with international best practice, to fulfil all roles assigned by Government.

*Questions Nos. 35 to 37, inclusive, answered orally.*

### **Protected Disclosures**

38. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on a person's (details supplied) contention contained within their report on health and safety procedures at Casement Aerodrome that they lacked the powers, experience and competence to investigate the allegations made by the whistleblowers; the reason the scope of a review was so limited despite assurances made by him in Dáil Éireann that the review would adequately deal with the allegations made in the protective disclosures received by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44025/17]

47. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to commission a second review of claims by former Air Corps staff that say their exposure to toxic chemicals from the late 1980s to the early 2000s caused chronic illnesses in view of the fact that the person commissioned to perform the first review (details supplied) has stated that they were not in a position to consider the substances in use or implications for human health arising from such use in view of the fact these issues are outside their competence. [43976/17]

65. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the reason the report into allegations contained within protective disclosures relating to Casement Aerodrome fails to address that staff are at greater risk of serious illness as a result of their service at Baldonnell; and his views on whether these serious matters can only be properly assessed through a thorough health study and survey of current and former members. [44041/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 38, 47 and 65 together.

The health and welfare of the men and women of the Defence Forces are a priority for me; that is why I ensured that protected disclosures alleging exposure to chemical and toxic substances were investigated by an independent third party. The reviewer's report has indicated that he felt that given the breadth of the remit of the Terms of Reference he commented in general terms on the Defence Force safety regime.

It must be remembered that prior to the receipt of the disclosures, litigation had first been initiated in relation to the subject matter of the disclosures. This therefore complicated the

approach to be taken in developing any parallel process. Notwithstanding this significant challenge, I put in place just such a parallel process. In light of the legally complex situation, I believe it was appropriate that an experienced legal professional was appointed.

It was the view of the independent reviewer that the Courts are best placed to examine issues in relation to allegations which were already subject to litigation. This is so given the historic nature of the complaints, and, significantly, that it potentially affects the reputations and good names of individuals. What the report shows is the difficulty in putting a parallel process to the courts in place.

The report also notes that the Health and Safety Authority is the appropriate statutory body to deal with such allegations.

I have furnished the report to those who made the protected disclosures and, before considering any further steps, I will await their views.

Separately and in parallel to the independent review, following an inspection in 2016, the Air Corps has continued to work with the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) to improve its health and safety regime. I have been informed by the military authorities that the HSA has formally noted the considerable progress made to-date by the Defence Forces towards implementation of a safety management system for the control of hazardous substances. Subject to completion of the improvement plan the HSA investigation is closed. However, it must be noted that in the Air Corps health and safety is a matter of ongoing monitoring, supervision and adjustment.

*Question No. 39 resubmitted.*

### **Defence Forces Reserve Strength**

40. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence when he anticipates the Reserve Defence Force achieving the overall establishment personnel number of 4,169; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43996/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The White Paper on Defence confirms that the primary role of the Reserve is to augment the Permanent Defence Force in times of crisis. In non-crisis situations, the main focus will be on training to prepare for this role. The Government appreciates the service of the members of the Reserve and the White Paper on Defence is clear that there is a continued requirement to retain and develop the Reserve.

Under the current phase of implementation of White Paper actions, two relate specifically to the RDF i.e. attracting recruits from all backgrounds and conducting a skills survey with a view to establishing a Specialist Reserve. Over the course of the lifespan of the White Paper, other projects relating to the development of the Reserve will be examined and developed by the Defence Organisation.

Recruitment to the RDF remains ongoing in 2017. A recruitment campaign to the Army Reserve and Naval Service began in July 2017. 1,221 applications to join the Reserve have been received of which 162 are female applicants. There have been 98 inductions to the Army and Naval Service Reserve so far this year (82 Army Reserve and 16 Naval Service Reserve).

The strength of the Army Reserve and Naval Service Reserve (as of 31 August 2017) was as follows:

- Army Reserve: 1,789 effective personnel
- Naval Service Reserve: 127 effective personnel.

Given the competing recruitment demands at present, where PDF recruitment is and should remain a priority, recruitment to the Reserve is continuing. However, it is not possible at this point to indicate when the AR and the NSR establishment of 4,169 will realistically be achieved and I will keep this under review.

I would like to assure the Deputy that I remain committed to the ongoing development of the RDF within the framework set out in the White Paper on Defence.

### **Defence Forces Ceremonies**

41. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of ceremonial public events that the Defence Forces have participated in alongside members of other military forces, excluding those events associated with our peacekeeping obligations, to date in 2017; the locations where these events took place; the military forces involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43812/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The Defence Forces have provided ceremonial support alongside members of other military forces in a number of ceremonial public events both here and abroad to date in 2017.

The level of participation is determined by my Department in consultation with the Military authorities and is dependent on the scale of the event in question and the availability of Military resources.

On 30 March 2017 in Ballyhaunis, the Defence Forces participated in a Commemoration to mark the 50th anniversary of Cpl. Patrick Gallagher, United States Marine Corps (RIP) who was killed in Vietnam on 30 March 1967. The Defence Forces provided an Honour Guard, Musicians and Wreath Bearer Party consisting of 12 persons. The Commemoration involved the participation of members of the US Marine Corps.

On 12 May 2017, the Defence Forces participated in a ceremony in Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin to mark the Unveiling of a number of Victoria Cross Stones by Minister Heather Humphreys and Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales. The Defence Forces provided 22 persons consisting of an Honour Guard, Colour Party, Musicians, Wreath Bearer Party and a Master of Ceremonies. The UK Military also participated in the ceremony with the provision of a Colour Party.

On 7 June 2017, the Defence Forces participated in two Ireland/UK joint wreath laying ceremonies in Messines, Belgium to mark the centenary of the Battle of Messines. One ceremony took place at the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery at Wijtschate and the second was at the Island of Ireland Peace Park. The Defence Forces provided 15 persons consisting of a Colour Party, Musicians, Wreath Bearer Party, Chaplain, Reader and a Master of Ceremonies. The UK Military were also involved in these ceremonies.

On 30 July 2017, the Defence Forces participated in a Commemoration Ceremony in Ypres, Belgium to mark the centenary of the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele) and provided one Reader for the ceremony. This event was organised by the UK authorities and readers from Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Germany also participated in the event.

## Defence Forces Recruitment

42. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if there will be a particular emphasis on the Border region due to Brexit in the Army recruitment campaign. [44070/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As part of a whole of Government approach, the Department of Defence is engaged in forward planning for the UK exit from the EU. While the full implications for the border will emerge during the course of the negotiations, it is this Government's stated goal to try to ensure that the current on-island border arrangements are maintained to the greatest extent possible. From the defence perspective, the fact of a UK exit from the EU does not of itself give rise to additional border security requirements at this time. On that basis, there is no particular emphasis on the Border region in the current recruitment campaign.

Primary responsibility for the internal security of the State rests with the Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána. Responsibility for the security aspect of border control rests with An Garda Síochána while the Revenue Commissioners also have responsibilities relating to their particular mandate.

Among the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence is the provision of Aid to the Civil Power which, in practice, means to provide assistance and support to An Garda Síochána when requested to do so. The Defence Forces also provide support to the Revenue Commissioners on request.

The Defence Forces at all times keep operational plans under constant review. There is ongoing close liaison between An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces regarding security matters and regular coordination and liaison meetings take place.

## Defence Forces Allowances

43. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on the claim that a combined 146,000 days annual leave were lost to members of the Defence Forces in the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43993/17]

58. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the steps being taken to ensure implementation of the EU working time directive for members of the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44051/17]

73. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the measures that will be put in place by his Department to recompense members of the Defence Forces who have been denied their full annual leave entitlement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43991/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 43, 58 and 73 together.

Depending on rank, the annual leave entitlement for officers varies from 31 to 43 days and for non-commissioned officers and privates from 28 to 30 days. Non-Commissioned Officers or Privates filling appointments as Instrumentalists in the establishments of the Defence Forces School of Music may be granted 31 days annual leave and members of the Naval Service serving afloat may be granted annual leave of 43 days. Members of the Defence Forces are entitled also to Public Holidays and to three specific military holidays.



In addition, a wide variety of special leave is available to Defence Forces personnel such as mission leave when deployed abroad, special leave on return home from overseas deployment, certain NCOs and Privates qualify for special leave on extension of service and on termination of service subject to various requirements. Certain Officers may be granted special leave prior to retirement.

Defence Force Regulations (DFR) A.11 governs the granting of leave, other than sick leave, in the Permanent Defence Force. As part of normal personnel management, the granting of annual leave is a balance between the entitlement of the individual to annual leave and the requirement to ensure continuity of a public service. Paragraph 16 of DFR A.11 provides for the carry-forward of annual leave, not granted or availed of in the leave year concerned. This can be of benefit both to the individual and the organisation. Officers may be allowed to carry forward a maximum of 24 days, non-commissioned officers and privates in the Army and Air Corps, a maximum of 19 days and non-commissioned officers and ordinary or able seamen of the Naval Service, a maximum of 24 days.

A request to increase the number of carry over days has been considered. The current carry over has been found to be proportionate and reasonable.

I have been advised by my officials that three plenary summonses have been taken by members of the Defence Forces in relation to the transposition of the Working Time Directive and the carryover of annual leave. Given that these matters are before the Courts it would be inappropriate for me to comment further on the legal proceedings which have been commenced in relation to this matter.

The implications of the Working Time Directive and its implementation, in respect of the Defence Forces under the Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997, has been reviewed by the Department of Defence. It is accepted that the current blanket exemption in respect of Defence Forces activities under the Act in implementing the Directive is no longer tenable. My Department has recently concluded an audit of the activities of the Defence Forces, with a view to determining what activities may qualify for a derogation or exemption under the terms of the Directive.

In November 2016, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation advised the Department that it received Government approval to amend the Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997, insofar as it provides for a specific exclusion for members of An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces. The responsibility for this legislation has recently moved to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and they are currently considering, in conjunction with my Department and the Department of Justice and Equality, the most appropriate legislative method by which to bring about the necessary amendments.

### **Defence Forces Strength**

44. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of members of the Defence Forces who have sought to buy their discharge since January 2016; the reason for this; the response he and senior defence force personnel made to this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44049/17]

53. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if his attention has been drawn to the number of personnel exiting the Defence Forces excluding mandatory retirements since 2015; if he is satisfied that the Defence Forces can still attract recruits at the number required; the steps he is taking to ensure that a career within the Defence Forces offers

financial stability and job security; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44039/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 44 and 53 together.

Since January 2016, 446 enlisted personnel have been discharged by purchase (as of 31 August 2017). Almost half of this figure, that is 205, were Recruits. Discharge by Purchase is governed by Defence Forces Regulation A10, which sets out the payment scale in relation to such discharges.

When assessing issues such as turnover of personnel, cognisance must be made of the fact that personnel leave for a variety of reasons and a significant number of recruits depart from the Defence Forces during the training phase. This is not unique to the Irish Defence Forces and is to be expected as the recruitment phase offers the individual an opportunity to assess fully the realities of military life. Turnover of personnel, in and of itself, is not a bad thing, as long as it is carefully managed and balanced with ongoing recruitment.

The White Paper on Defence recognises that continuous recruitment is the lifeblood of the Defence Forces; providing young, motivated and enthusiastic personnel to replenish military formations for operational deployments. To that end, the Defence Forces are working hard to maximise the recruit intake. There is significant ongoing recruitment at both enlisted and officer level and it is anticipated that 800 new personnel will have been inducted into the Permanent Defence Force during 2017. This includes general service recruits, apprentices, cadets and direct entry officers. As the panel from the general service recruitment campaign held earlier this year has now been exhausted, a further recruitment campaign is under way with a closing date of the 27th October 2017.

A range of recruitment methods are being employed including direct entry competitions for specialist positions and the scope to further expand direct entry is being considered.

The fact that further consideration by the Public Service Pay Commission of recruitment and retention issues is provided for under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, is a welcome development. I was particularly pleased with the deal that was negotiated between the Department of Defence, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and PDFORRA, which saw significant adjustments to the pay scales for post 2013 general service recruits and privates. These pay increases have recently been applied. The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 also provides for further pay increases ranging from 5.75% to 7.25% depending on the individual's current wage threshold.

I remain committed to maximising recruitment to the Defence Forces and ensuring that, where possible, the terms and conditions of service are as favourable as they can be within the current budgetary parameters.

### **Defence Forces Reorganisation**

45. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on the fact that the 2012 reorganisation of the Defence Forces has meant many personnel have much longer commutes to work, which is a strain on them and their families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43994/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The current Defence Forces organisational structures have now been in place for almost five years and followed a series of barrack closures (which continued the a rationalisation agenda initiated by previous

Governments). The re-organisation of the Defence Forces resulted in a fundamental restructuring of Army Formations and Units across the country including a number of operational posts. This and previous barrack closures were undertaken in order to enhance operational readiness and deployability. The re-organisation led to a re-configuration of operational processes, from a garrison-based system to a more flexible, deployable system that makes more efficient use of all resources, including personnel.

I have been advised by the military authorities that, for the most part, personnel are only deployed within their own Brigade area. Occasionally, personnel from Donegal for example, have been deployed for security operations to other locations, including Dublin which is a key centre for large scale operations and ceremonial activity for the Defence Forces.

It is important that military personnel have experience of the full range of duties and of being part of a military force in a situation where they may be called upon to reinforce operations in different parts of the country. This requires their deployment to locations where that experience can be gained.

While efforts have been made to minimise impacts on individuals and families through retaining personnel in their Brigade area insofar as possible, it is essential that the military authorities have the capacity to deploy appropriate resources to wherever required in order to meet security and other taskings and it is my intention to retain this flexibility within the Defence Forces.

### **Common Security and Defence Policy**

46. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the contacts he and his Department have had with the EU institutions and also with other EU member states in the past six months; the nature of their discussions on defence matters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43811/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** There is significant ongoing engagement by Ireland with the EU Institutions and with other EU member States on the important area of security and defence. These meetings take place both bilaterally, and within the institutional framework of the European External Action Service, the EU Military Committee and the European Defence Agency.

My officials participate in all meetings of the Political and Security Committee (PSC), the Political-Military Group (PMG) as well as other relevant Council preparatory bodies. My officials also participate in the European Defence Agency (EDA) meetings. Ireland is represented on the European Union Military Committee (EUMC) composed of the Chiefs of Defence (CHODs) of the Member States who, on a day to day basis, are represented in Brussels by the Military Representatives from the Permanent Representations of the member States.

Senior officials from my Department participate in meetings with their counterparts from other member States in Brussels, along with bilateral meetings in Brussels and at capital. These include, the regular meetings of the Defence Policy Directors from the member States and senior level meetings within the framework of the EDA.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the formal and informal meetings of Ministers at EU level, which I attend, provide a significant opportunity to engage bilaterally with Defence Ministers from other member States on issues of concern to Ireland, both within the scope of the Ministerial but also more broadly. When attending European Council meetings, I also avail of the opportunity to engage in informal bilateral discussions with my EU counterparts en-marge of



the meetings which is an important aspect of Ministerial attendance. At these meetings, I have raised Ireland's key considerations in the area of security and defence, as and when the opportunity arises. This also includes the issue of Brexit where I have emphasised Ireland's concerns in order to ensure that these are fully reflected in the EU position during ongoing negotiations.

The main discussions at EU level on Defence over the last six months have centred on implementation of actions envisaged under the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy. The Global Strategy provides the EU with a guiding framework for external action under the Common Foreign and Security Policy. We have also discussed current EU operations, capability development and key security and defence challenges, along with Commission initiatives on the European defence industrial and technology sector, and the establishment of the European Defence Fund.

*Question No. 47 answered with Question No. 38.*

### **Defence Forces Strength**

48. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans to introduce retention policies to reduce the numbers leaving the Permanent Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43800/17]

63. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the action that will be taken to address the significant reduction in officer numbers in the Defence Forces since 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43995/17]

68. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which the strength of the Defence Forces - Army, Naval Service and Air Corps - continues to be replenished to ensure the maintenance of optimum strength; if particular recruitment proposals are in mind to deal with situations arising; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43978/17]

72. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the numbers serving in the Permanent Defence Forces at present; the projected numbers serving at the end of 2017; the numbers projected for 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43799/17]

74. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the way in which he plans to address the staffing shortages in the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44031/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 48, 63, 68, 72 and 74 together.

The Government is committed to maintaining the establishment of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500 personnel. The rank distribution within the 9,500 PDF establishment was set in 2012 on foot of a reorganisation of the Defence Forces. The White Paper on Defence (2015) confirmed that this organisational structure continues to meet Defence needs. A key challenge is to fill vacancies within the establishment and reach the 9,500 strength ceiling. As of 30 September 2017, the strength of the PDF was 9,062 (Whole Time Equivalent).

Due to the robust nature of military life, placing as it does unique physical and psychological demands on individuals, it is not unusual that there should be a turnover of personnel in the Defence Forces, and this is not unique to the Irish Defence Forces.

A range of recruitment methods are being employed including direct entry competitions for specialist positions and the scope to further expand direct entry is being considered. I have also directed civil and military management to develop terms and conditions to allow former members of the Defence Forces, with sought after skills, to return to service. I anticipate that these will be brought to the Representative Associations in the coming weeks through the C&A process.

The fact that further consideration by the Public Service Pay Commission of recruitment and retention issues is provided for under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, is also to be welcomed. The Defence Forces are working hard to maximise the recruit intake and I am informed that the projected inductions for 2018 are anticipated to be similar to the 2017 induction rate.

There is significant ongoing recruitment at both enlisted and officer level and it is anticipated that approximately 800 new personnel will have been inducted into the Permanent Defence Force during 2017. This includes general service recruits, apprentices, cadets and direct entry officers. As the panel from the general service recruitment campaign held earlier this year has now been exhausted, a further recruitment campaign is under way with a closing date of the 27th October 2017.

I remain committed to maximising recruitment to the Defence Forces and ensuring that, where possible, the terms and conditions of service are as favourable as they can be within the current budgetary parameters.

### **Defence Forces Recruitment**

49. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the position regarding the new Army recruitment campaign; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44069/17]

217. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the progress to date in respect of proposed recruitment to the Defence Forces; the way in which each branch of the Defence Forces is likely to benefit from the recruitment programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44250/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 49 and 217 together.

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.

There is significant ongoing recruitment at both enlisted and officer level and it is anticipated that 800 new personnel will have been inducted into the Permanent Defence Force during 2017. This includes general service recruits, apprentices, cadets and direct entry officers.

The latest general service recruitment, which is currently ongoing since 27 September 2017

and closes on 27 October 2017, reflects the Government's commitment to meeting the Permanent Defence Force strength targets.

It is too early to be specific as to where new recruits will be posted but all areas of the Permanent Defence Force will benefit from this new campaign.

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.

*Question No. 50 answered with Question No. 33.*

### **White Paper on Defence**

51. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his plans for a peace and leadership institute in the Curragh; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44032/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As you will be aware from my response to your previous PQ 23328/17 on 17 May 2017, the White Paper on Defence included a commitment to evaluating the potential development of a new Institute for Peace Support and Leadership Training at the Defence Forces Training Centre in The Curragh. The Programme for a Partnership Government also included a commitment to developing this Institute. It is foreseen that the new Institute will have international standing and contribute to the overall development of knowledge and experience in the areas of peace support, leadership and conflict resolution.

Scoping work was carried out on the proposal throughout 2016. A concept paper has been developed and some initial consultation with national and international third level and research institutes and potential philanthropic contributors has also taken place. Arising from this initial scoping work, it was decided to conduct a formal feasibility study. The evaluation of tenders received in relation to the feasibility study is currently ongoing.

### **Defence Forces Recruitment**

52. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will report on the results of campaigns to encourage the recruitment of more women into the Defence Forces; if these campaigns are proving successful; his plans to continue these campaigns into 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44048/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The Government is committed to a policy of equal opportunity for men and women in the Defence Forces and to the full participation by women in all aspects of Defence Forces activities. This is underlined by a commitment in the Programme for Government to increase the level of female participation in the Defence Forces. A number of specific initiatives have been implemented to increase the level of female participation. These include the targeting of female websites as part of recruitment campaigns and visits to female schools by Defence Forces personnel to promote a career in the Defence Forces to women.

In 2016, a total of 47 females were inducted to the Defence Forces, representing 6.81% of the overall intake. For 2017, a total of 53 females have been inducted, representing 9.4% of the overall intake.

In 2016, 10 female cadets were inducted, representing 11.23% of Officer Cadets. This year, 20 female cadets were inducted, representing 20.2% of Officer Cadets.

Notwithstanding recent proactive initiatives to increase female participation, I believe that there is a need to continue to develop and promote strategies over the life span of the White Paper that support increased female participation in the Defence Forces.

*Question No. 53 answered with Question No. 44.*

## **Defence Forces Review**

54. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the way he plans to address the issues of manning levels and retention of experience in the Defence Forces as identified by the University of Limerick in its focus group report 2017; his views on claims from military sources that the reduction in training periods was diluting the professionalism of the Defence Forces; and if the current strength of the Defence Forces is just over 8,900, which is 600 below the strength required to carry out its basic duties despite the recent recruitment drive. [44034/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The Defence Forces Climate Survey was commissioned on foot of a recommendation contained in the third and most recent Report of the Independent Monitoring Group (IMG) which was established to oversee the implementation of recommendations relating to harassment, bullying, discrimination and sexual harassment within the Defence Forces.

The focus group report referred to by the Deputy is a follow up to the first phase of the Climate Study. It further explores the issues raised in the original survey. The comments quoted therein cover a wide range of issues relating to human resources management including, amongst others, pay and conditions (particularly pay for the lowest paid members of the Defence Forces), vacancies, recruitment and retention, promotion systems, performance management, leadership, culture, morale, stress and work-life balance. I was briefed on the Report at the end of June and I met with the Representative Associations on 13 July 2017, ahead of its official publication a week later.

I subsequently tasked civil and military management with examining the report and identifying those issues which are priorities. While work to progress many of the issues was already underway as part of the implementation of the White Paper on Defence, I have directed that certain White Paper projects be brought forward and that work commence on these immediately.

I have directed civil and military management to initiate a broader view of contracts for enlisted personnel and to bring forward recommendations for my consideration. I have also requested proposals in respect of retaining specialists, providing for re-entry and where appropriate, direct entry, for my consideration and I expect to be in receipt of these shortly.

The Government is committed to maintaining the establishment of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500 personnel, as stated in the 2015 White Paper on Defence. Targeted recruitment has been and is currently taking place across the range of recruitment streams namely, general service, cadets, apprentices and direct entry officers. The commencement of over 300 NCO promotions will be significant in terms of filling vacancies within the establishment, while providing career development opportunities for personnel.

The changes to the Recruit Training Syllabus referred to by the Deputy were made by the Military Authorities following a routine review, which identified elements of training being

deemed more appropriate to a later stage within the development cycle of the enlisted soldier than heretofore had been the case. Such reviews are intended to ensure that training syllabi remain efficient and effective.

I am satisfied that Defence Forces training continues to equip members of the Defence Forces to fully discharge the roles assigned by Government.

### **Defence Forces Remuneration**

55. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if his Department's allocation in budget 2018 will see the issue of chronic low pay addressed in the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44030/17]

71. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on the items included in budget 2018 which would be of direct benefit to the salaries and standards of living of Defence Forces personnel and their families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44046/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 55 and 71 together.

Budget 2018 includes an increased provision of €25 million for 2018, and an additional €98 million for capital expenditure out to 2021. This reflects the Government's commitment to defence and to our Defence Forces.

The 2018 pay allocation of some €509 million provides for the pay and allowances for a full strength Permanent Defence Force of up to 9,500 personnel, 550 civilian employees and 350 civil servants.

The benefits to all employees from the budget will accrue to Permanent Defence Force personnel. This includes reductions in the rates of the Universal Social Charge and an increase of €750 in the income tax standard rate bands.

The rates of remuneration and conditions of employment in the Defence Forces are set by reference to relative levels of pay across the various parts of the public sector. The Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts of 2009-2015 and the Public Service Stability Agreement 2013-2018 (the Lansdowne Road Agreement) define current pay policy for Public Servants and members of the Permanent Defence Force.

PDFORRA signed up to the Lansdowne Road Agreement (LRA) agreement in March 2017. The finalisation of negotiations under the agreement allowed for the commencement of the process for the implementation of pay increases and arrears, which have now been applied to the Permanent Defence Forces. An increase of 2.5% from 1 January 2016, for annualised salaries up to €24,000 and 1% for annualised salaries between €24,001 and €31,000 was included in the weekly payroll of 5 July 2017. An increase of €1,000 from 1 April 2017, on annualised salaries up to €65,000 per annum was paid on 19 July 2017.

The pay of general service recruits and privates who joined the Permanent Defence Force post 1 January 2013, has been increased further following an agreement facilitated by the WRC between the Department of Defence, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and PDFORRA. These improved payscales, have been backdated to 1 July 2016. The payments were made to relevant personnel on 30 August 2017.



On completion of recruit and three star training newly qualified 3 star Privates and their Naval Service equivalent can expect minimum gross annual earnings of €27,000 (inclusive of military service allowance).

Going forward, there is the potential for further increases arising from the recent negotiations on the extension to the Lansdowne Road Agreement. The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 contains proposals for:

- a 7.25% increase over the period of the agreement for those earning less than €30,000 per annum

- a 6.75% increase over the period of the agreement for those earning between €30,001 and €32,000 per annum, and

- a 5.75% increase over the period of the agreement for those earning over €32,000 per annum.

The proposals have been presented to the Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations who participated in the negotiation process. They are subject to ballot by members of the Associations.

Future remuneration of Defence Forces personnel will continue to be dealt with within this process.

### **Defence Forces Representative Organisations**

56. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which he has had ongoing discussions with the relevant representative bodies in the Defence Forces with a view to identifying and resolving issues of concern; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43979/17]

224. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which the issues raised by the various representative bodies within the Defence Forces are being examined with a view to resolution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44257/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 56 and 224 together.

A Scheme of Conciliation and Arbitration (C&A) for members of the Permanent Defence Force was established in 1993 and provides a formal mechanism for the Permanent Defence Force representative associations.

Having regard to commitments made under national pay agreements, members of the Permanent Defence Force can make representations in relation to their pay and conditions of service through their representative bodies.

Where agreement is not reached, it is open to both official and representative sides to refer the matter to an adjudicator or an arbitration Board to settle the matter. Officials in my Department continue to engage on a regular basis with the Representative Associations in a positive and collaborative process within the C&A Scheme to resolve issues.

I announced my intention previously to review the C&A Scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force. The review will start by the end of 2017 and will be guided by an indepen-

dent chairperson. Officials in the Department of Defence are finalising the terms of reference for that review and I hope to be in a position to circulate this document to the Representative Associations shortly.

Earlier this month I attended the PDFORRA Annual Delegate Conference. In addition, I am meeting with officials from the Defence Forces Representative Associations tomorrow.

### **Defence Forces Medicinal Products**

57. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the position regarding progress toward the discontinuance of the use of Lariam in the Defence Forces following the passage of a motion in the Houses of the Oireachtas calling for same in June 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43977/17]

59. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the efforts which have been made to withdraw and replace the anti-malaria drug Lariam and implement the proposals contained in the cross-party motion that was passed in the previous Dáil Éireann term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44035/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 57 and 59 together.

As I stated in my reply to the Private Members' Motion, which was before the Dáil on 28 June, fundamentally the use of anti-malarial drugs is a medical matter that should be decided by qualified medical professionals. In the Defence Forces these are decisions for highly qualified Medical Officers having regard to the specific circumstances of the mission and the individual member of the Defence Forces.

I would like to again remind the House that there is ongoing litigation in relation to this matter. The State Claims Agency manages claims on behalf of the Department of Defence and has confirmed that to date 56 claims have been made by members and former members of the Defence Forces who allege personal injury as a result of their consumption of mefloquine (Lariam). The first case was scheduled to be heard in the High Court on 4th July last and has now been adjourned to 3 November 2017. You will therefore appreciate that I am constrained in my discussions on the matter.

I wish to assure the House that the health and welfare of the men and women of the Defence Forces is a high priority for me and for the Defence Forces.

*Question No. 58 answered with Question No. 43.*

*Question No. 59 answered with Question No. 57.*

### **Defence Forces Pensions**

60. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on the reference within LRA 2 to an interdepartmental working group on the alignment of the mandatory public service retirement age with the payment of the State pension contributory; if the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform informed the Defence Forces representative associations during pay talks that, due to the unique demands of the military service with respect to early mandatory retirement ages, the Minister of the sector could provide, in appropriate circumstances, arrangements to satisfy the entitlement for the State pension contributory for

those who pay PRSI class A; and the way in which he will respond to this proposal. [44022/17]

61. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will report on discussions he has had with the representative organisations on the issue of mandatory retirement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [43997/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 60 and 61 together.

I assume that the Deputy is referring to Paragraph 6.4 of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 which indicates that a review is being undertaken by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, with public service employers, of the current statutory and operational considerations giving rise to barriers to extended participation in the public service workforce up to and including the current and planned age of entitlement to the Contributory State Pension.

My understanding is that this review does not address the position of those public servants for whom, due to operational considerations, earlier mandatory retirement ages apply.

I am informed that no commitment was given to the Staff Side by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform as part of the recent pay talks, that “the Minister of the sector could provide, where appropriate, arrangements to satisfy the entitlement for the State pension contributory for those that pay PRSI Class A”.

A claim to increase the mandatory retirement age for all officers has been received from the Representative Association of Commissioned Officers (RACO) under the Conciliation and Arbitration (C&A) Scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force. The Deputy will appreciate that as discussions under the C&A scheme are confidential to the parties involved it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the matter at this time.

### **Departmental Contracts**

62. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if his Department has entered into contracts for the procurement of services or products with suppliers in attendance at a trade fair (details supplied) on foot of the attendance of departmental officials at same. [43975/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The bi-annual Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) exhibition was held in London from Tuesday 12 September 2017 to Friday 15 September 2017.

The event was attended by a number of Department of Defence and Defence Forces personnel. Attendance by Defence Organisation personnel at such Defence exhibitions is standard practice and has been a feature at previous exhibitions. It is best practice in Defence acquisition to carry out product and services research at major equipment shows of this nature.

I am advised that the attendance of Department/ Defence Forces personnel at the event did not result in the signing of any new contracts for the procurement of services or products with particular suppliers in attendance at the exhibition. In this regard, all procurement is carried out in accordance with guidelines laid down by Government and with the Directives of the European Union. The purpose of the attendance of Department of Defence and Defence Forces personnel was to visit the many exhibition stands involving the wide range of companies that the Defence Organisation deals with on a regular basis. These include companies involved

in the land, sea and air environments, all of which are of interest to the Defence Organisation given the various roles of the Defence Forces at home and overseas. It was also an opportunity for personnel to visit the stands of several Irish companies exhibiting.

The exhibition provided personnel with a valuable opportunity to meet key suppliers across the full spectrum of military and defence equipment and activities. This ties in to the primary purpose for the procurement of such defensive equipment by the Department of Defence which is to enhance the capability of the Defence Forces. Attendance at such events is necessary to ensure that the Defence Forces retain the capabilities to fulfil all roles assigned by Government both at home and overseas.

*Question No. 63 answered with Question No. 48.*

### **Defence Forces Retirements**

64. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on recent reports that, due primarily to poor pay and conditions, almost 3,000 members of the Defence Forces have taken early retirement in the past five years; the implications for staffing levels in the Defence Forces; his plans to improve conditions for those serving; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44050/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Given the unique and demanding nature of military life, there is understandably a very high level of turnover among Defence Forces personnel. However, this is not new and the Defence Forces have always had a large turnover of approximately 500 personnel on an annual basis. In the years between 2012 and 2016, discharges averaged some 581 annually. Moreover, a certain level of turnover is, of course, desirable as a human resource and organisational objective in order to maintain an appropriate age profile across the Defence Forces and to retain an approach to regular revitalisation.

Voluntary exit interviews of personnel of all ranks conducted by the Defence Forces indicate that the reasons for leaving range from economic factors to family circumstances, lifestyle and a desire for a change of career.

To redress the balance of personnel turnover there is significant ongoing recruitment at both enlisted and officer level and it is anticipated that approximately 800 new personnel will have been inducted into the Permanent Defence Force during 2017. This includes general service recruits, apprentices, cadets and direct entry officers. A range of recruitment methods are being employed including direct entry competitions for specialist positions and the scope to further expand direct entry is being considered.

In terms of pay, following sign up by PDFORRA to the Lansdowne Road Agreement, recent adjustments to salary scales will significantly benefit general service recruits and privates who joined the Defence Forces since 2013 (increases of between 8% and 13% depending on scale point). The Public Service Stability Agreement 2018 -2020 also provides for further pay increases. The fact that further consideration by the Public Service Pay Commission of recruitment and retention issues is provided for under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020, is also a welcome development. Further pay increases ranging from 5.75% to 7.25% depending on the individual's current wage threshold will also be paid under this Agreement.

As the Deputy will be aware, there is a significant ongoing programme of HR development within the Defence Organisation.

I remain committed to maximising recruitment to the Defence Forces and ensuring that, where possible, the terms and conditions of service are as favourable as they can be within the current budgetary parameters.

With the support of the Chief of Staff and within the resources available, the Government is committed to retaining the capacity of the Defence Forces to operate effectively across all roles and to undertake the tasks laid down by Government both at home and abroad.

*Question No. 65 answered with Question No. 38.*

### **Defence Forces Training**

66. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on reports that training for Defence Forces recruits has been reduced in a bid to reverse an exodus of personnel from the organisation; if the period of basic training for new recruits has been cut from 18 weeks to 16; and his views on whether this is preventing the Defence Forces from reaching minimal operational strength. [44040/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The changes to the Recruit Training Syllabus were the result of a routine review.

Following consultation with Formations, Brigade Training Centres and utilising recruit input by way of questionnaire, the syllabus was reviewed and subsequently reduced in March 2017 from a 17 week course to a 15 week course. The reduction in training time arose from elements of training being deemed more appropriate to a later stage within the development cycle of the enlisted soldier, than hitherto had been the case.

All career courses within the Defence Forces are accredited to outside academic institutions such as NUIM and IT Carlow. These institutions are represented on the Defence Forces Academic Council. From a Quality Assurance perspective, all syllabi and any subsequent changes must be presented to and passed by the Defence Forces Academic Council. The changes to the recruit syllabus were passed by the Academic Council.

I am satisfied that the changes made to the Recruit Training Syllabus are reasonable in the circumstances and were based on a course requirement review.

### **Defence Forces Reorganisation**

67. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will review the decision to disestablish the 4th Western Brigade and the implications arising from the reduction in the number of Army brigades from three to two; if none of the three Army brigade commanders was consulted prior to the report that recommended the decision to reduce the number of Army brigades being lodged with them in 2012; and the way in which, in the five years since this decision was made, roster duties to be performed in Dublin requires the daily rotation of military units in Dundalk, Athlone and Donegal. [44024/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The current Defence Forces organisational structures have now been in place for almost five years. The basis for the current structures was a major re-organisation of the Defence Forces which occurred in 2012 which led to the consolidation of three under-strength Army brigades into two full strength brigades. A major re-organisation was necessary because it was clear that the three brigade structure was no longer viable, particularly when compared to international norms, and



to achieve the most effective force in keeping with the stabilised establishment for the Permanent Defence Force of 9,500. This required that an emphasis be placed on the consolidation of under-strength units into a smaller number of full strength units, a reduction in the number of headquarters and the associated re-deployment of personnel from administrative and support functions to operational units. These benefits will continue to be gained into the future.

The decision to move to a two brigade structure involved full consultation with the Defence Forces, and was taken by the then Minister on foot of a joint recommendation made to him by the Secretary General and the Chief of Staff.

The subsequent White Paper on Defence, which was published in 2015, resulted from a comprehensive examination of Defence requirements over a ten year planning horizon and it specifically provides for the retention of the Army's two Brigade structure. Accordingly, there are no plans to return to the previous structure.

I am advised by the military authorities that in order for 2 Brigade to execute its full range of operational, training and administrative tasks, Units based outside Dublin perform operational duties in Dublin on certain occasions each month. The execution of such duties enhances situational awareness of the capital for all units. These duties normally require the conduct of a wide range of familiarisation patrols throughout the greater Dublin area to 2 Brigade vital installations, and other Dublin based specific operational taskings.

*Question No. 68 answered with Question No. 48.*

### **Defence Forces Personnel**

69. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence his views on reports that proper security clearance has not been given to new recruits in the Defence Forces; his plans to rectify this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44045/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Security vetting, which is a matter for the military authorities, has a number of layers and is conducted in conjunction with an Garda Síochána. The process has changed and modernised in recent years and is kept under ongoing review.

The Military Authorities have kept me apprised of any changes in procedure and have confirmed to me that the security vetting procedures in place are both necessary and appropriate. For operational security reasons it would be inappropriate to set out or discuss the detailed processes.

### **Budget Measures**

70. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the funding allocated in budget 2018 to current and proposed Defence Forces projects and infrastructure in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44033/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** My Department does not provide funding for the Defence Forces on a geographical basis. Where there is a requirement for the upgrade and development of a particular military installation, funding is made available from the Defence Vote.

Built infrastructure projects are developed as part of the ongoing building programme, which

is designed to modernise and enhance the training, operational and accommodation facilities available to members of the Defence Forces. The capital element of the building programme focuses mainly on infrastructural projects comprising the construction of new buildings and the refurbishment of existing buildings and facilities.

The programme is based on operational requirements and is compiled on a priority basis by my Department in conjunction with the Military Authorities. The anticipated spend on built infrastructure capital projects nationally in 2018 is €14.2m. The funding will provide for a number of significant projects at the Curragh Camp, Co. Kildare including the replacement of storage facilities at the Ordnance Depot and the refurbishment of accommodation blocks in Pearse Barracks.

Under the capital building programme, there has been considerable capital investment at the Curragh Camp in recent years. Between 2008 and 2017, my Department has invested in excess of €26m on major building projects at the Camp.

The White Paper on Defence identified the need to develop a rolling five-year capital plan for the provision of future Defence Forces built infrastructure requirements, taking account of the priority needs of the Defence Forces. The process of developing the plan is currently underway and is expected to be finalised by the end of 2017.

*Question No. 71 answered with Question No. 55.*

*Question No. 72 answered with Question No. 48.*

*Question No. 73 answered with Question No. 43.*

*Question No. 74 answered with Question No. 48.*

### **Live Register Data**

75. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach the number of young persons aged 18 to 24 years of age signing on the live register at each of the 25 Intreo offices in the Dublin city and county area, in tabular form. [44159/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Live Register series provides a monthly breakdown of the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Benefit, Jobseeker's Allowance and other registrants as registered with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

The most recent Live Register figures available are for September 2017.

The following table shows the number of persons under 25 years of age on the Live Register in Dublin City and County Intreo Offices as provided to the CSO by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection .

It should be noted that the Live Register is not a definitive measure of unemployment as it includes part-time workers, and seasonal and casual workers entitled to Jobseeker's Benefit or Allowance.

**Number of persons under 25 years of age on the Live Register in Dublin City and County Intreo offices, September 2017**

Intreo Office	Persons under 25 years
Balbriggan	301
Ballyfermot	350
Ballymun	384
Bishop Square	449
Blanchardstown	534
Clondalkin	624
Coolock	413
Cork Street	488
Dún Laoghaire	257
Finglas	588
Kilbarrack	283
Kings Inn Street (Parnell Street)	278
Navan Road	375
Nutgrove (Rathfarnham)	162
Swords	248
Tallaght	1,065
Dublin City and County	6,799

Source: CSO Live Register

### National Economic and Social Council

76. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach when the vacancies on the National Economic and Social Council will be filled. [44165/17]

**The Taoiseach:** I appoint members to the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) in accordance with the provisions of the National Economic and Social Development Office Act 2006. The legislation provides for nominations from five sectors - business and employer, ICTU, farming and agricultural, community and voluntary, and environmental. I also appoint up to 6 public servants and 8 independent members.

All appointments to the Council with the exception of a small number of independent members have been made. Arrangements to fill the remaining vacancies are being put in place, and will follow the process set out in the Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards.

The members of the Council are:

#### **Business and Employer**

Maeve McElwee, IBEC

Tom Parlon, CIF

Ian Talbot, Chambers Ireland

#### **ICTU**

Patricia King, ICTU

Tom Geraghty, PSEU

Shay Cody, IMPACT

**Farming and Agricultural\***

Damien McDonald, IFA

John Enright, ICMSA

TJ Flanagan, ICOS

**Community and Voluntary**

Sean Healy, Social Justice Ireland

Brid O'Brien, INOU

James Doorley, NYCI

**Environmental**

Kate Ruddock, Friends of the Earth

Oonagh Duggan, Birdwatch Ireland

Michael Ewing, Irish Environmental Network

**Public Servants**

Martin Fraser, Secretary General, D/Taoiseach (Chair)

Elizabeth Canavan, Assistant Secretary General, D/Taoiseach (Deputy Chair)

Derek Moran, Secretary General, D/Finance

Robert Watt, Secretary General, D/Public Expenditure and Reform

Orlaigh Quinn, Secretary General, D/Business, Enterprise and Innovation

John McCarthy, Secretary General, D/Housing, Planning and Local Government

**Independent Experts**

Edgar Morgenroth, ESRI

Michelle Norris, UCD

Philip Hamell, Department of the Taoiseach.

\*nominations were received this month and the appointment process is underway.

**Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Funding**

77. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the new budget allocation of the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement for 2018. [44108/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The distribution of the 2018 allocations across my Department's Vote, including that of the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement, will be determined through the 2018 Revised Estimates Volume (REV) process which will be conducted in the weeks ahead.

It is expected that finalisation and publication of the 2018 REV allocations will be made by my colleague, the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform in early December 2018.

### Brexit Expenditure

78. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of businesses estimated to avail of the new €300 million Brexit loan scheme; the average size of loans envisaged; when the scheme will come into operation; the length of time the scheme will operate for; and if she will provide detailed information on the proposal. [44109/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The Brexit Loan Scheme will provide affordable working capital financing to Irish businesses that are either currently impacted by Brexit, or will be in the future. The new Scheme will be delivered by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) through commercial lenders to get much needed working capital into Irish businesses.

The minimum loan size will be €25,000. The maximum loan size is still under review, but it will be in excess of €1 million. Given this variance in potential loan size, an average loan size and the number of businesses availing of those loans is difficult to forecast.

Further details of the scheme will be provided over the coming weeks. SBCI will issue an open call inviting lending institutions to participate before the end of October. The scheme is expected to be in place early in the new year. It is anticipated that the scheme will remain open until 2020.

### Departmental Budgets

79. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the 2017 and 2018 budget allocations for all offices and agencies under her Department's aegis, in tabular form. [44110/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The distribution of exchequer funding allocations as per the 2017 Revised Estimates Volume for each Office and Agency under the aegis of my Department and as provided through my Department's Vote is set out in the table.

The distribution of the 2018 allocations will be determined through the 2018 Revised Estimates Volume (REV) process which will be conducted in the weeks ahead. It is expected that finalisation and publication of the 2018 REV allocations will be made in December 2017.

2017 Revised Estimates Volume Allocations	
(i) Offices of the Department	
Companies Registration Office (including the Registry of Friendly Societies)	€7.488m
Employment Appeals Tribunal	€1.709m
Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement	€4.895m
Labour Court	€3.648m
Patents Office	€2.841m
Workplace Relations Commission	€13.379m



2017 Revised Estimates Volume Allocations	
(i) Offices of the Department	
(ii) Enterprise Agencies	
Intertrade Ireland	€7.960m
IDA Ireland	€179.264m
National Standards Authority of Ireland	€5.802m
Enterprise Ireland	€269.502m
Science Foundation Ireland	€172.631m
Health And Safety Authority	€18.112m
Competition and Consumer Protection Commission	€12.138m
Personal Injuries Assessment Board	€0.228m
Low Pay Commission	€477k
Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority	€2.105m

The Deputy should note that the funding provision to Enterprise Ireland covers two sub-heads on my Department's Vote, Subheads A7 and B4, which span general supports to indigenous firms and for research and development/innovation supports. The table shows the combined allocations of the two subheads.

The table above does not capture other Exchequer funding being provided to Enterprise Ireland in 2017 from the Votes of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Department of Communication, Climate Action and Environment.

Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland are also provided with funding from the National Training Fund (NTF).

The operations of a number of the enterprise agencies are also supported through the generation, retention and use of Agency Own Resource Income, which is subject to annual sanction by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. The Agencies concerned are Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, National Standards Authority of Ireland and the Health and Safety Authority.

The operations of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB) is essentially self-financing from the fee generation received from personal injury claims, typically in the region of €12 million per annum. The exchequer provision as outlined in the table above covers pensions requirements.

The operations of the Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority and the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission are part-funded through fees levied on certain regulated entities.

The funding provision to Inter-Trade Ireland is provided on a North-South basis and annual allocations are finalised in conjunction with the Northern Administration.

The Department also provides funding annually to the 31 Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) through Subhead A8 of my Department's Vote. Working closely through the Local Authority system, the LEOs support the micro-enterprise sector in the start-up and expansion phases and stimulate enterprise potential at local level. The 2017 allocation to the LEOs through my Department's Vote totals €32.93 million broken down between €22.5 million in Capital and €10.431 million in Non-Pay monies. The LEOs are also supported through funding provided via the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government Vote.

Responsibility relating to the Low Pay Commission transferred to my colleague, the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection in September 2017.

## Health and Safety Authority Data

80. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of additional staff that will be allocated to the Health and Safety Authority in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44111/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen):** As Minister for Trade, Employment, Business, EU Digital Single Market and Data Protection I welcomed record funding in Budget 2018 totaling €871 million for this Department. This included an increase of €400,000 for 2018 in the Health and Safety Authority's pay allocation which will enable it prepare to meet the challenges its regulatory functions will face post Brexit.

To date in 2017, the Authority has received sanction for 11 posts and is currently in the process of filling these.

This Department will work with the Authority to determine where these additional new posts can best be targeted.

## Departmental Agencies Data

81. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the State boards under the aegis of her Department which are subject to the provisions of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44166/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The following agencies under the aegis of my Department are required to implement the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies:

- Enterprise Ireland;
- National Standards Authority of Ireland;
- The Personal Injuries Assessment Board;
- Health and Safety Authority;
- IDA Ireland;
- Science Foundation Ireland;
- Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority.

The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) must implement the code of practice although some of its compliance requirements are not applicable to the CCPC due to its corporate structure.

Microfinance Ireland is established as a company under the Microenterprise Loan Fund Act 2012 and is not an Agency of the Department in the traditional sense. Issues of corporate governance between it and DJEI are covered in a Service Level Agreement, dated 3 March 2017.

## Departmental Funding

82. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the funding provided by her Department to the European Consumer Centre, Dublin, in each of the years 2013 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44167/17]

83. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the persons appointed by her Department to the board of the European Consumer Centre, Dublin; the number of male and female board members; the date of first appointment of each board member; the number of terms served by each board member; when the term of office of each current board member will expire, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44168/17]

84. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if appointments to the board of the European Consumer Centre, Dublin, made since November 2014 have been made in line with Government guidelines on appointments to State boards, including public advertisement of vacancies on stateboards.ie; if appointments to the board of the ECC Dublin are made in line with section 4.5 of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies on terms of appointment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44169/17]

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

ECC Ireland is a company limited by guarantee without a share capital. It is a non-profit organisation and registered as a charity with the Charities Regulatory Authority.

Companies limited by guarantee (CLG) operate under Part 18 of the Companies Act 2014. Sections 1194-1198 of the Act apply in relation to the appointment of Directors to the Board. Appointments to the Board are a matter for ECC Ireland and I, as Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, have no direct function in relation to such appointments. Details of the current and former members of the Board of ECC Ireland are a matter of public record and can be accessed by contacting the Companies Registration Office (CRO).

A member of staff of my Department sits on the Board of ECC Ireland. He was appointed on 27 November 2013.

ECC Ireland is a member of the European Consumer Centre Network (ECC-Net) which provides consumers across Europe advice on their rights when shopping in another EU Member State. The European Consumer Centre Network (ECC-Net) is an EU-wide network co-funded by the European Commission and the Member States. National funding for ECC Ireland is channelled via the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) from the allocation received by CCPC from my Department each year. Details of the funding provided to ECC Ireland for the years 2013 – 2017 are set out in Table 1.

Since November 2015, ECC Ireland is designated under S.I. No. 500/2015 - European Union (Online Dispute Resolution for Consumer Disputes) Regulations 2015 as the ODR contact point in the State for the purposes of Article 7 of the Regulation (EU) No. 524/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 May 2013 on online dispute resolution for consumer disputes. ECC Ireland is funded directly by my Department for carrying out the ODR contact point function. Details of the funding provided for the years 2016 and 2017 are set out in Table 2.

**Table 1: Funding provided to ECC Ireland by the CCPC**

Year	€
2013	214,840
2014	214,840
2015	214,840
2016	214,840
2017 – to date	155,189
2017 (budget full year)	214,840

**Table 2: Funding provided to ECC Ireland for the ODR Contact Point function**

Year	€
2016	€45,000
2017 – to date	€32,437
2017 (budget full year)	€47,000

### Brexit Expenditure

85. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the criteria required to apply for the €300 million Brexit loan scheme for SMEs announced in budget 2018; when details of the scheme will become available from the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44170/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald):** The Brexit Loan Scheme will provide affordable working capital financing to Irish businesses that are either currently impacted by Brexit, or will be in the future. The new Scheme will be delivered by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) through commercial lenders to get much needed working capital into Irish businesses.

The criteria for the Brexit Loan Scheme are still being finalised. Broadly, the Scheme will be open to businesses of up to 499 employees that can demonstrate that they are exposed to the impact (or potential impact) of the Brexit vote. They must also use the loan to meet working capital or cash flow requirements.

Further details of the scheme will be provided over the coming weeks. SBCI will issue an open call inviting lending institutions to participate before the end of October. The scheme is expected to be in place early in the new year. It is anticipated that the scheme will remain open until 2020.

### Stamp Duty

86. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding the 6% stamp duty rate on farmland sales; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44197/17]

89. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Finance his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44144/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 86 and 89 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.

Transitional arrangements for signed contracts would apply. These are likely to be the normal changes that apply in relation to stamp duty changes.

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

### **Tax Code**

87. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Finance the detail of the dwelling house exemption in respect of capital acquisitions tax; if he will review the provisions of this relief in order that family members inheriting two houses as opposed to one house are not disadvantaged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44106/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that section 86 of the Capital Acquisitions Tax Consolidation Act 2003 provides an exemption from capital acquisitions tax on the inheritance or gift of a dwelling house in certain circumstances.

One of the qualifying conditions for the dwelling house exemption is that the beneficiary does not have an interest in another dwelling house when he or she claims the exemption. This restriction applies whether a beneficiary already had such an interest before the inheritance or inherits more than one house as part of the same inheritance. The restriction also applies whether a house is situated in Ireland or abroad and would include, for example, a holiday home. Where two dwelling houses are inherited at the same time, the beneficiary can qualify for the dwelling house exemption on one of the houses only where he or she disclaims the interest in the other house.

The reason for this restriction is that the exemption is designed to prevent hardship in cases where individuals are sharing a home and where one or more individuals are bequeathed the home in circumstances where they would otherwise have to sell the property in order to pay capital acquisitions tax and be left without a home. It is considered that this situation does not arise when a beneficiary owns other residential property or properties. On this basis I do not propose to change this condition of the relief.

### **Budget Measures**

88. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that due to the failure to alter PRSI bands in line with the minimum wage increase in budget 2018, a person on the minimum wage earning €18,000 per annum will pay over 45% of their expected rise back in tax; his plans to introduce changes to remedy same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44112/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Following the recommendation of the Low Pay Commission, the national minimum wage will increase from €9.25 per hour to €9.55 per hour in 2018. For an individual working full-time on the minimum wage (i.e. 39 hours per

week), this should result in an increase to gross income of €608 per annum. A single person on the current minimum wage, i.e. with annual employment income of €18,759, pays income tax, PRSI and USC of €883 per annum. At the increased minimum wage of €19,367, they will pay €1,108 in tax in 2018. This is an effective tax rate on gross earnings of just 5.72%.

The marginal tax rate on the additional gross income exceeds the rate that might be expected of 26% (being 20% income tax, 2% USC and 4% PRSI) due to the tapered PRSI tax credit. However, this is as a consequence of the exemption from PRSI which applies on lower incomes, and which is a factor in the very low effective tax rate which still applies on the increased gross income of a minimum wage worker.

Prior to Budget 2015, a significant step effect existed in employee PRSI. At that time, once an employee's earnings exceeded €352 per week they became liable to 4% PRSI on all their income. This resulted in an immediate additional payroll deduction of €14.08, so an increase in gross pay of 1 cent could cause a fall in net income of €14.07. The employee's net income did not recover to pre-PRSI levels until gross earnings exceeded €372 per week.

This step effect was addressed in Budget 2016 by the introduction of a PRSI credit at the entry-point to employee's PRSI, which is tapered out as income increases. The credit commences at income of €352.01 per week, and tapers out at a rate of one-sixth of income in excess of this threshold. The credit fully tapers out as income reaches €424 per week. The taper mechanism addresses the step effect while confining the benefit of the credit to earnings within the taper range.

While the tapered withdrawal of the credit does result in a higher marginal rate of deduction on income within the taper band, this must be viewed in the context of the overall effective tax rate on the employee's total gross income of just 5.72%. For comparison, a single person earning €35,000, around the average wage, will have an effective tax rate of 17.5% in 2018.

Notwithstanding this step effect, it should also be noted that Ireland's PRSI rates are low by comparison to personal and employer social insurance rates in other jurisdictions.

*Question No. 89 answered with Question No. 86.*

## National Debt

90. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which the liabilities entered into by local authorities in respect of long-term leasing for houses with approved housing bodies is calculated; if these are included on the State balance sheet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44148/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As I have already explained in my written answer to parliamentary question 42703/17, the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme provides a means whereby properties can be built or bought by Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) with the combined use of State and private funding, and leased by AHBs and Local Authorities from private providers, for the provision of social housing. This scheme is underpinned by a lease and other legal agreements. These provide that rental payments are made by the State over an agreed long-term time period, typically 20 years. In return, the housing unit is made available for social housing purposes.

Rental payments from Local Authorities to AHBs are classified as general government expenditure in accordance with the European System of Accounts (ESA 2010) and are recognised annually as the service (i.e. the rental properties) are made available annually throughout the



contract. The liability inherent in the original lease contract is not recognised upfront and it is not classified as debt.

### **Help-To-Buy Scheme Eligibility**

91. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether land which has been purchased for commercial agricultural use and which was never used to live in should affect families' eligibility to qualify for first time buyers relief on a primary principal residence they now wish to buy as their home; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44187/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Help to Buy initiative is available to persons who have not previously owned, or part-owned, a dwelling. I am advised by Revenue that the ownership of purely agricultural land that does not include a dwelling would not preclude a person, who otherwise meets the qualifying criteria, from availing of the scheme.

Comprehensive details of the operation of the Help to Buy are available on Revenue's website at [www.revenue.ie/en/tax-professionals/tm/income-tax-capital-gains-tax-corporation-tax/part-15/15-01-46.pdf](http://www.revenue.ie/en/tax-professionals/tm/income-tax-capital-gains-tax-corporation-tax/part-15/15-01-46.pdf)

### **Pension Provisions**

92. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance if the guaranteed income of €12,700 associated with drawing down a private pension early is remaining at the current rate or if it will be reverting to over €18,000; and if there will be changes to this matter as a result of the recent budget or as part of the Finance Bill. [44234/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that an individual in a defined contribution pension savings arrangement has the option, on retirement, of putting the funds accumulated under the arrangement into an Approved Retirement Fund (ARF), subject to conditions.

Where such an individual is under the age of 75 at the time of exercising the option and does not meet the requirement of having a minimum guaranteed pension income for life of €12,700 per annum, he or she is required to set aside an amount of €63,500 (or the remainder of the pension fund if less than €63,500 after taking a retirement lump sum) by investing the amount in an Approved Minimum Retirement Fund (AMRF) or by the purchase of an annuity. The purpose of the AMRF is to ensure that an individual, without the minimum guaranteed pension income for life, has a capital nest egg to provide for the latter years of his or her retirement.

In Finance Act 2011, the minimum guaranteed pension income requirement of €12,700 and the set aside amount of €63,500 were respectively increased to a pension income based on 1.5 times the State Pension (Contributory), which amounted to €18,000 per annum, and a set aside amount of 10 times the annual State Pension (Contributory) rounded to the nearest €100, which amounted to €119,800 or the remainder of the pension fund if less than the increased amount.

Finance Act 2013 rescinded the 2011 changes on the grounds, among other reasons, that without an appropriate transition period the 2011 changes would have detrimentally affected the plans of many individuals preparing for retirement over the medium term. The original limits of €12,700 and €63,500 were re-introduced, with the intention, at the time, of examining the restoration of the higher 2011 limits at a later date. In a reply dated 25 June 2015 to Parliamen-

tary Question 25553/15, my predecessor stated that the re-introduction of the higher limits was being examined in the context of the preparations for Finance Bill 2015. In the event, however, Finance Act 2015 did not restore those limits.

I have no plans at this stage to re-introduce the higher guaranteed lifetime pension income or set-aside limits which were initially introduced in Finance Act 2011.

### **Equality Proofing of Budgets**

93. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the paper “Equality Budgeting - Proposed Next Steps in Ireland” is the document he referred to in his budget 2018 speech when he spoke of the development of a policy document which was published on 13 October 2017; if this paper is Government policy; the timeframe for its implementation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44262/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The paper ‘Equality Budgeting: Proposed Next Steps in Ireland’ was published alongside Budget 2018. The paper is the policy document which provides an overview of the concept of equality budgeting, the progress made in integrating equality budgeting into expenditure management and the estimates process, and the proposed next steps for the introduction of equality budgeting in Ireland. The paper sets out the pilot approach that will be adopted for gender budgeting in the Budget 2018 budgetary cycle anchored in the performance budgeting framework. The next step in this process will be the publication of objectives and indicators for the pilot policy areas in the Revised Estimates Volume in December.

The paper follows the Programme for a Partnership Government commitment to develop the process of budget and policy proofing as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights. This is also a commitment that has been included in the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020.

### **Flood Prevention Measures**

94. **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. [44291/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** Refurbishment of flood defence embankments commenced at Gurrane on 27/07/17. The proposed works was extended further downstream on the Maine Estuary due to deterioration of the flood defence embankment over the last 12 months. Consequently this resulted in additional work on the project consuming substantially more subsoil material to construct this section of embankment than was anticipated which affected the overall maintenance programme.

Any localised weaknesses within the remaining reach of flood defence embankment will be strengthened prior to vacating the site for this year. A thorough inspection of the remaining flood defence embankments protecting the Gurrane Polder will be conducted which will inform the maintenance programme for 2018.

### **Special Educational Needs Data**

95. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 165 of 10 October 2017, if he will request the NCPE to begin collecting data on the number of children turned down annually for speech and language classes in primary schools despite meeting the qualifying criteria, in view of the fact that adapting capacity to meet demand is difficult if not impossible with the absence of this data; the reason the NCPE has not collected this data to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44094/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Students with Specific Speech and Language Disorder (SSLD) may attend a special class for students with SSLD with speech and language therapy services provided in class by the HSE or attend a mainstream school with additional teaching supports and speech & language therapy through the HSE primary care service.

The NCSE monitors and reviews the requirement for special class places in particular areas and has capacity to establish such new special classes where necessary, subject to the willingness of schools to open such classes. The NCSE welcomes expressions of interest from schools in opening special classes to meet the demand for special class provision. In deciding on the location of a special class SENOs take into account both the present and the future potential need for special class provision and they must be satisfied that the special class is sustainable and appropriately located. SENOs liaise with relevant professionals in their area to arrive at an informed decision. In the case of SSLD special classes, the SENO liaises with HSE speech and language therapists.

The opening of a Speech and Language class is contingent on the HSE being in a position to provide Speech and Language therapy to the students in the class. The enrolment of students in an SSLD special class is managed locally by an Admissions & Discharges Committee, comprising the Speech and Language Therapy Manager, Speech and Language Therapist, Class Teacher and Principal. The NCSE is not represented on this committee.

The planning of special class provision for SSLD is based on information available to Speech and Language Therapists on the number of children diagnosed with SSLD. Therefore, it is not necessary for the NCSE to collect such data as it is available to the HSE.

### **School Accommodation Provision**

96. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a decision will be made on an application for an early intervention unit at a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44095/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I am pleased to advise the Deputy that a joint application for additional accommodation, from the two schools referred to, has recently been approved for the provision of ASD units. The school authorities have been notified of the position.

### **Schools Refurbishment**

97. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the fire safety works required at a school (details supplied) to bring it up to fire safety standards; the status of the work; the completion date for each work item; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44097/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The scope of works for the school referred to by the Deputy involves the upgrading of fire-stopping and fire protection, replacement of fire doors and works to the emergency lighting

The fire stopping/protection works have commenced and are due for completion in March 2018. New fire doors have been ordered and once on site will be fitted over a two week period and outside of school times. Electrical works are to commence this week and are due to be completed within the next 4 to 6 weeks.

The remainder of the works will be completed as soon as possible.

### **National Educational Psychological Service Data**

98. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the average wait times for National Educational Psychological Service assessments in each county in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and the number of NEPS psychologists employed in each of the years 2010 to 2016 and to date in 2017 by county, in tabular form. [44103/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I can inform the Deputy that my Department's National Educational Psychological Service provides educational psychological support to all primary and post-primary schools. This involves direct support in the event of a critical incident, access to national and regional support and development work to build school capacity to support students, access to a NEPS psychologist for responses to queries arising, and access to individual pupil casework via a NEPS psychologist or through the Scheme for the Commissioning of Psychological Assessments, (SCPA). Every child therefore has access to educational psychological assessment services either through the NEPS or SCPA psychologist.

NEPS does not maintain waiting lists but, in common with many other psychological services and best international practice, NEPS has adopted a consultative model of service. The focus is on empowering teachers to intervene effectively with pupils whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. Psychologists use a problem solving and solution oriented consultative approach to maximize positive outcomes for these pupils. NEPS encourages schools to use a continuum based assessment and intervention process whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Teachers may consult their NEPS psychologist should they need to at this stage in the process. Only in the event of a failure to make reasonable progress, in spite of the school's best efforts in consultation with NEPS, will the psychologist become involved with an individual child for intensive intervention or assessment.

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

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

The Deputy will be aware that the Programme for a Partnership Government commits that we will invest additional resources in the National Educational Psychological Service to ensure earlier intervention and access for young children and teenagers and to offer immediate sup-

port to schools in cases of critical incidents. Delivery on this commitment is underway in 2017 with an additional eleven NEPS psychologists recruited or in the process of being recruited currently. Additionally my Department, in conjunction with the Public Appointments Service (PAS) has from established regional recruitment panels, been engaged throughout the year in securing recruits to fill vacancies in the NEPS psychologist posts due to ongoing retirement, resignations, etc.

I attach for the Deputy's information detail of the NEPS psychologist staffing numbers from 2009/10 to date as well as recruitment in train and in prospect in this regard. By way of clarification I would inform the Deputy that NEPS psychologists are assigned across eight Regions and sited in 23 offices countrywide but not on a county basis.

NEPS staffing numbers currently stand at a level which is higher than any stage since the service was established in 1999 and are due to rise further with the imminent recruitment detailed therein.

My Department remains committed to the continued support of NEPS and the valuable services it provides our schools and I am pleased to inform the Deputy that an additional ten educational psychologists will be provided to NEPS in 2018.

Number of NEPS Psychologists by academic year - 2009/10 to date

Academic Year	Nep Psych Count	Full E.W.T No. Of Psychologists (1)
2009/10	153	146.9
2010/11	165	158.9
2011/12	173	166
2012/13	171	168.8
2013/14	177	168.1
2014/15	177	166.9
2015/16	175	164.99
2016/17	171	161.2
2017/18 (current date)	185	174.7
- by End November 2017 (^)	3	3
- Confirmed but no Start Date (#)	4	4
- Starting in 2018 (&)	2	2
- With PAS (*)	1	1
	195	184.7

Notes:

- Staffing Numbers for previous year are taken at 1st January of that year
- (^) Recruits have agreed start dates.
- (#) The public appointments service has recently processed these recruits and referred them on to the Department's HR Unit for contract negotiations and formal offer. It is expected that these recruits start will be before year's end.
- (&) Two recruits have delayed start date due to maternity leave
- (\*) PAS are currently polling the recruitment panels for a recruit

**Apprenticeship Data**



99. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the new budget allocation for apprenticeships in 2018; the estimated number of apprentices this will support in 2018; and the estimated number of new apprenticeship programmes that will be introduced in 2018. [44113/17]

100. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new apprenticeship programmes that have been introduced to date in 2017; and the number of participants in each new programme, in tabular form. [44114/17]

104. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of persons who have commenced an apprenticeship programme in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44153/17]

105. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the detail of the apprenticeship programmes in operation; the number of participants on each apprenticeship programme, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44154/17]

106. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the detail of the ten new apprenticeship programmes announced in budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44155/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 99, 100 and 104 to 106, inclusive, together.

The material sought by the Deputies in relation to the number of apprentices on each apprenticeship programme is set out in the tables.

Since its first call for proposals the Apprenticeship Council has been working with consortia to develop their proposals into sustainable apprenticeships that can be delivered on a nationwide basis. To date eleven new apprenticeships have been developed by the Council. During 2016 two new programmes got under way in Insurance Practice and Industrial Electrical Engineering. This year has seen the commencement of new apprenticeships in Polymer Processing Technology, Manufacturing Technology, Manufacturing Engineer, Accounting Technician and two programmes in International Financial Services (Associate & Specialist).

Apprenticeships in Commis Chef and two ICT apprenticeships (Network Engineer and Software Developer) have recently been validated and are currently approving employers and recruiting apprentices and are expected to get underway shortly.

Further new apprenticeships are to be submitted for validation to Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) shortly and, subject to successful validation, it is expected that a further four new schemes will get underway later this year in various sectors including Engineering and Haulage.

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

A key commitment for this year set out in the Plan was the issuing of a second call for apprenticeship proposals to refresh the pipeline of proposals already established through the first call. The second call closed on the 1 September with 77 proposals received from a range of sectors and occupations. The Apprenticeship Council is currently evaluating these proposals and will report its findings in November.

Budget 2018 made a provision of €122m for apprenticeship training for next year. This represents an increase of almost 24% over the 2017 allocation and will support an apprentice



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population which is forecast to be in excess of 13,000 by the end of 2017 and new registrations which are forecast to be over 6,000 during 2018. As set out in the Plan we have targeted a further ten new schemes for 2018 which will bring the total new apprenticeships to 25, almost doubling the number of apprenticeship schemes on offer in Ireland.

Apprentice Population 2017 by Sector and Trade as 30/9/17

Construction Total	2692
Brick and Stonelaying	111
Cabinet Making	2
Carpentry and Joinery	1050
Floor and Wall Tiling	0
Painting and Decorating	77
Plastering	59
Plumbing	1211
Stonecutting and Stonemasonry	33
Wood Manufacturing and Finishing	149
Wood Machinist	0
Electrical Total	5058
Aircraft Mechanics	167
Electrical	4185
Electrical Instrumentation	292
Electronic Security Systems	108
Instrumentation	35
Refrigeration	271
Engineering Total	1742
Farriery	17
Industrial Insulation	42
M.A.M.F.	590
Metal Fabrication	654
*Pipefitting	77
Sheet Metalworking	119
Toolmaking	243
Motor Total	2334
Agricultural Mechanics	148
Construction Plant Fitting	238
Heavy Vehicle Mechanics	509
Motor Mechanics	1279
Vehicle Body Repairs	160
Printing & Paper Total	18
Print Media	18
Priniting	0
Bookbinding	0
Grand Total	11844

\*Please note: From end of 2016 Pipefitting is included in the Engineering Family of Trade.

Consortia Led Apprenticeships Total 2016/2017 @ 30 September 2017

	Grand Total
Industrial Electrical Eng	30
Total	30

	Grand Total
Manufacturing Engineering (Level 6)	30
Manufacturing Engineering (Level 7)	12
Polymer Processing Tech	17
Total	59
Accounting Technician	40
Insurance Practice	144
International Financial Services Associate	1
International Financial Services Specialist	8
Total	193
Total consortia led	282
Grand Total (All)	12,126

Apprentice Registrations	2014	2015	2016	2017 (as of end September 2017)
Total	2,698	3,153	3,821	3,478

### State Examinations

101. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason junior certificate art examination papers which were released online on 2 October 2017 have not yet been received by all students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44123/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

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

### State Examinations

102. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the marking scheme for the new leaving certificate art course work; if it has been decided that the marking scheme would be devised with the first set of examinations; if so, the way in which teachers will be expected to prepare students for the examinations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44124/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

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

### State Examinations

103. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the concerns of teachers, parents and students about the grading process for students of the art leaving certificate examination when only 1.2% of arts students were

awarded a H1 grade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44125/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations.

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

*Questions Nos. 104 to 106, inclusive, answered with Question No. 99.*

### **Student Support Schemes**

107. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the detail of the proposed measures to provide enhanced postgraduate funding and bursaries to disadvantaged students announced in budget 2018; the additional funding provided; the estimated number of students who will benefit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44156/17]

**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.

I secured €4.5m in budget 2017 to develop a set of initiatives to support increased third level access. Of this funding of €1m was provided for the 1916 Bursary Fund bursaries worth €5,000 for 600 students coming from non-traditional backgrounds into college, with support for at least 120 socio-economically disadvantaged lone parents. This will be a €6m regional call over three years. The additional €1m was secured in Budget 2018 to meet the rolling cost of the implementation of the new 1916 Bursary Fund.

Other new initiatives supported under new funding secured through the budgetary process of €13.2m include:

- Measures to support 120 people from disadvantaged groups to become teachers, an initiative designed to create strong role models within the community.

- Funding of €2.5m for support programmes to help 2,000 students, of which 200 will be lone parents, from non-traditional backgrounds to enter college and successfully complete their course. This will be a €7.5m regional call over 3 years.

- An additional €1m added to the Student Assistance Fund to ring-fenced for extending fund to part-time students. €3m over 3 years.

### **Student Grants Data**

108. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of overpayments of SUSI grants for students nationally in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017 with accrued values (details supplied); the number of overpayments of SUSI grants for students attending the IT Carlow Wexford campus in each of the years 2012 to 2016 and to date in 2017 with the same accrued values; and the number of overpayments of SUSI grants for students attending the IT Carlow campus with permanent addresses in Wexford with the same accrued values, in tabular form [44181/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The information in the format requested by the Deputy, is set out in the table.

Table 1 - Overpayments for students nationally

	Values +										
Year	€1,000	€2,000	€3,000	€4,000	€5,000	€6,000	€7,000	€8,000	€9,000	€10,000	Total
2012/13	128	67	65	5	18	0	0	1	0	0	284
2013/14	408	287	61	15	12	2	0	0	0	1	786
2014/15	463	250	69	13	20	7	0	2	0	0	824
2015/16	225	106	25	7	7	0	1	1	2	0	374
2016/17	323	106	12	2	6	0	0	0	0	0	449
Totals	1547	816	232	42	63	9	1	4	2	1	2717

Table 2: IT Carlow - overpayments for students attending Wexford Campus

	Values +										
Year	€1,000	€2,000	€3,000	€4,000	€5,000	€6,000	€7,000	€8,000	€9,000	€10,000	Total
2012/13	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
2013/14	4	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
2014/15	8	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13
2015/16	6	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	10
2016/17	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Totals	20	8	7	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	36

Table 3: IT Carlow - overpayments for students attending Carlow Campus with Permanent address in Wexford

	Values +										
Year	€1,000	€2,000	€3,000	€4,000	€5,000	€6,000	€7,000	€8,000	€9,000	€10,000	Total
2012/13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2013/14	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
2014/15	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
2015/16	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
2016/17	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Totals	8	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	12

### Special Educational Needs Staff Remuneration

109. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if special provision will be made for those special needs assistants on income supports who took part in his Department's July provision and are not already in full-time employment in order that payment for this July work for such SNAs will be made promptly and not in November as is the case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44182/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The July Education Programme is available to all special schools and mainstream primary schools with special classes catering for children with autism that choose to extend their education services through the

month of July. The programme is also available for pupils with a severe/profound general learning disability.

Where a school chooses not to extend their services for July, all eligible children are granted home based July provision, on application.

This year's common pay date of 2nd November 2017 was well advertised prior to the start of the July Education Programme.

In 2016 over 8,700 children benefited from the July Education Programme. This resulted in approximately 8,300 payments being issued.

### **School Transport Data**

110. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of eligible students under the school transport scheme who applied for the 2017-18 scheme who did not receive a seat in each county, in tabular form; if a feedback system exists between Bus Éireann and his Department to monitor the excess number of eligible students who apply for the scheme and do not receive a seat; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44200/17]

**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.

I have asked Bus Éireann to reply directly to the Deputy with the detailed information requested.

### **Teacher Fee Refund Scheme**

111. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a teacher fee refund for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44227/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Refund of Fees scheme is administered on behalf of my Department by Marino Institute of Education.

Officials in my Department have checked with Marino Institute and I can confirm that the teacher in question applied under the 2015/16 Refund of Fees scheme and their application was approved for payment. They received payment in August 2017.

As the Refund of Fees scheme is retrospective, the funding paid in 2017 relates to study undertaken in the academic year 2015/2016.

### **Student Grant Scheme Applications**

112. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a decision on a

SUSI application for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44280/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As part of a comprehensive customer service and communications strategy provided by Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI), to ensure that all necessary avenues are open to applicants to receive the information they need, a dedicated email and phone line service is provided by SUSI for Oireachtas members. This was established to meet an identified need for applicants who choose to engage the assistance of their public representatives in making enquiries about their grant applications.

This service complements the established channels provided by SUSI which include online application tracking, a dedicated website, a telephone helpdesk, email and social media, including Facebook and Twitter.

Enquiries may be emailed direct to SUSI at oireachtas@susi.ie. Staff in SUSI are responding to email queries within a matter of days.

## Human Rights

113. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the situation with regard to LGBTQI persons (details supplied) in Egypt. [44089/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I am aware of the worrying situation with regard to LGBTI people in Egypt, to which the Deputy refers.

The promotion and protection of the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) individuals globally is a priority for Ireland in our international human rights advocacy, including our engagement at the UN Human Rights Council, at EU meetings and through our diplomatic network. Ireland attaches importance to combating all forms of discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity and we strongly believe that consensual, same-sex relationships should not be criminalised.

Our commitment to LGBTI rights is delivered through our engagement at international human rights fora, notably at the UN and EU, as well as through our bilateral relations, in cases we believe that this can be helpful or effective.

Ireland co-sponsored the milestone UN Human Rights Council resolution on human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) in 2011. This was the first time the United Nations explicitly declared that discrimination and violence on the basis of sexual orientation is in violation of international human rights norms.

In addition, Ireland identified the advancement of rights for LGBTI persons as a priority for the term of our HRC membership from 2013 to 2015. During this period we consistently highlighted discrimination against LGBTI persons and worked with other countries to ensure that this issue is now firmly embedded in the work of the HRC.

Ireland will continue to prioritise the promotion and protection of the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) individuals, who continue to suffer disproportionate levels of violence and face systemic discrimination in many countries.

## Foreign Conflicts



114. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the reports that at least 4,000 refugees, including pregnant women, newborn babies and unaccompanied children, were caught up in violence between rival factions battling for control of Sabratha in Libya and had to be rescued; if his attention has been further drawn to an organisation's (details supplied) reports on conditions faced by refugees trapped in detention centres in Libya; and if he will meet with the organisation to discuss the gross violation of the human rights of refugees in Libya. [44121/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The situation in Libya is very unstable, and the violence in Sabratha and the humanitarian consequences for civilians, are a cause for serious concern. As I have stated before in this House, the ongoing fighting in Libya exacerbates the situation for migrants. The government has only partial control of the territory, which limits the capacity of the international community to ensure accountability for these alleged abuses.

I know the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) is working in extremely difficult conditions to provide assistance to the refugees and migrants in Sabratha. I commend their work, and I am glad that Ireland is able to provide core funding to UNHCR, in support of their global efforts.

I know that conditions in many detention centres are appalling, and I strongly condemn all human rights violations and abuses against refugees and migrants. At the June 2017 Foreign Affairs Council, Ireland expressed deep concern at the conditions experienced by migrants in detention centres in Libya. EU Foreign Ministers also adopted Council Conclusions in July, which urge the Libyan authorities to improve humanitarian access to and conditions in detention centres, as well as to look for alternatives to detention.

The EU has a number of practical initiatives which provide assistance and protection to migrants, refugees and host communities in Libya, in particular inside detention centres. The EU also provides training (including in international humanitarian law, human rights and gender issues) and other support to enhance the border management capacities of the Libyan authorities. The EU supports the work of UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), to ensure that there are adequate reception facilities for migrants.

In September, officials from my Department met with the organisation referenced by the Deputy to discuss the human rights situation in Libya, in particular in detention centres. A return to stability and an end to lawlessness in Libya is crucial to ensuring an end to these terrible abuses, and I will continue to monitor the situation closely.

A step-change in improving the situation of migrants in Libya requires political stability and a return of security, through the formation of a functioning government and a return to order throughout the country. Through the EU, Ireland both supports UN mediation and regional efforts in pursuit of stabilisation in Libya.

Ireland's aid programme, which has a focus on ending extreme poverty, hunger and under-nutrition, is also contributing to improving conditions of life in countries of transit and origin for migrants.

## **Northern Ireland**

115. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress made in dealing with legacy issues despite the absence of the Northern Ireland Executive; the discussions that have taken place with Secretary of State James Brokenshire or the UK

Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs on legacy issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44201/17]

**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 all of its institutions are operating effectively, and that outstanding commitments from previous Agreements are fully implemented.

The Government is continuing to work with the British Government and the parties to support the urgent resumption of the devolved institutions of the Good Friday Agreement. Thereafter, I believe that prompt and definitive progress can and should be achieved with the implementation of the comprehensive legacy framework provided for under the Stormont House Agreement of 2014.

In the discussions at Stormont Castle on outstanding commitments, that took place between March and June of this year, my predecessor and I engaged extensively with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and all of the political parties to seek a way forward to implement the Stormont House legacy framework. This built on the progress made during the talks in 2015 on legacy issues.

It is critical that the momentum from the recent Stormont Castle discussions is continued in the weeks and months ahead. The Government has emphasised to all parties the urgent need to reach an agreement to move ahead with the establishment of the Stormont House legacy framework, which victims and survivors continue to wait for delivery of, having had to wait for far too long already for a suitable and effective system in Northern Ireland for dealing with legacy issues from the Troubles.

The next step in relation to the legacy institutions is expected to be a public consultation by the British Government on their draft legislation to establish the legacy bodies provided for in the Stormont House Agreement. Legislation will also be required in this jurisdiction to provide for cooperation with the Stormont House legacy bodies. The preparation of legislative proposals for consideration by the Government and the Oireachtas is being advanced by the Department of Justice and Equality and my Department.

I have also emphasised in discussions with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the political parties, the need to ensure that legacy inquests are properly resourced, and urged all with responsibilities in relation to legacy inquests to move forward as quickly as possible to implement the helpful proposals of the Lord Chief Justice for Northern Ireland.

The Government will continue to engage with the British Government and the political parties to seek an urgent move forward on legacy issues, to establish the Stormont House framework, meet the legitimate needs and expectations of victims and survivors, and contribute to broader societal reconciliation as an integral part of the Peace Process.

### **Emigrant Support Services**

116. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the significant increase in the level of rejections of young Irish citizens for J1 trainee programmes by the US Embassy in Dublin; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that a number of young persons who are legally in the USA and who wish to stay and further their training legally prior to returning to Ireland to employ their skills will be making applications to extend their stays within the next six months; his views on whether the recent change of US policy in respect of the J1 programmes threatens its viability; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [44260/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I am aware of media reports that the J1 programmes are being reviewed by the US administration, in the context of President Trump’s “Hire American” Executive Order. Any cuts to the J1 trainee programme or any significant increase in the level of rejections would be of serious concern to the Government.

My officials in Washington and Dublin have made clear to the US Administration the importance that the Government places on the J1 programmes.

The J1 suite of programmes has been a tremendously successful part of the Ireland -US relationship for almost 50 years, with 150,000 Irish third-level students and young people having participated in programmes over that time.

The J1 offers more than a dozen options for participants wishing to experience life in the US while providing opportunities to work while doing so, one of which options is the trainee visa programme.

The Government does not have a role in administering any of the J1 programmes, which is overseen by the US Department of State and run by a number of not-for-profit US sponsoring bodies, who, in turn, work with agencies here in Ireland.

Nevertheless, officials at the Embassy of Ireland in Washington DC are in regular contact with the US State Department regarding the J1 programme, while officials from my Department are also in regular contact with the US Embassy in Dublin.

I can assure the Deputy of the Government’s commitment to the continued success of all the J1 programmes and that we will stay in close contact with the US authorities and convey any concerns that we have as to administration of the programme.

### **Brexit Negotiations**

117. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has communicated a position to the Government’s view of the position which should be reflected in the mandate being prepared and is due to be given to the European Commission for trade negotiations with UK; if the Government emphasised the importance of ongoing equivalence in equality, employment and environmental standards within such negotiations; if he has expressed a view for or against the inclusion of investor courts in this trade mandate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44261/17]

**Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Article 50 negotiations between the EU and the UK are proceeding on the basis of the phased approach set out in the European Council Guidelines of 29 April 2017.

Ireland fully supports this approach, which foresees that discussions on the future EU-UK relationship, including trade, will get underway as soon as sufficient progress has been made on the EU’s key priorities under the withdrawal process – notably citizens’ rights, the UK’s financial settlement and the Irish specific issues.

At EU level, my immediate focus is therefore on working with my EU counterparts to ensure the negotiations continue in a positive and constructive manner with a view to ensuring that swift progress can be made on the withdrawal issues. This will be vital in ensuring that the

parallel discussions on the future EU-UK relationship, including in relation to trade, can begin as soon as possible.

In parallel, I am working intensively with colleagues from across all Departments to ensure a coordinated Government response to Brexit. Work at Cabinet level is being prepared through cross-Departmental coordination structures, chaired at very senior level by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. These represent a frequent and active channel through which all relevant Departments 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.

This work is building upon the extensive cross-Government research, analysis and consultation with stakeholders that has already been undertaken, including as reflected in the comprehensive document "*Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union: The Government's Approach*" published on 2 May. This document set out key aspects of the Government's overall approach, including that any future Free Trade Agreement with the UK should promote regulatory conformity, ensure ways to manage potential regulatory divergence, and impose the disciplines needed in order to ensure a level playing field. Such an agreement should also include a robust dispute resolution mechanism and associated enforcement process, and these or similar mechanisms will also be necessary to ensure that agreed rules and undertakings in other areas are honoured. Future tariff arrangements will be a key focus, as will the need to minimise any burdens of customs or transit costs. Our hope is that a largely or wholly tariff-free arrangement will be possible.

Ireland's overriding position is that a future EU-UK Free Trade Agreement should be comprehensive and ambitious and as wide as possible in its scope, while ensuring a level playing field and protecting the integrity of the Single Market. This is an outcome that I will be working hard to achieve with my EU27 counterparts.

### **Garda Training**

118. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason for the 8% reduction in the Garda training and development budget in 2018. [44093/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I can confirm for the Deputy that there are no reductions in the Garda training budget. It was noted in the published Budget Day estimate for 2018 for the Garda Vote that a proportion of the estimate for some items, including the subhead to which the Deputy refers is now reflected in a new subhead for the Garda College. This has led to the reallocation of certain costs between subheads in 2018 compared with 2017. This will be apparent in the more detailed subhead information to be published in the Revised Estimates Volume later in the year but I can inform the Deputy that the allocation for the Garda College is in the region of €30.5 million.

A total budget of €1.65 billion has been provided to An Garda Síochána in 2018, an increase of 2% on 2017. It should be noted that the Garda allocation substantially continues to benefit from the significant additional funding that was provided in 2016, and maintained in 2017, to fund the sustained response to tackle gangland crime, fund the continuation of Operation Thor and ensure that measures to prevent international terrorism can be continued.

The training costs of An Garda Síochána are an intrinsic part of the overall allocation, which are absorbed throughout the Garda Vote whether in the payroll costs of the personnel providing the training or the travel and subsistence costs of members travelling to regional centres for in-service training etc. The vast bulk of training to members of An Garda Síochána is provided

internally by suitably qualified personnel.

It is the case that the training requirement will even grow further over the next couple of years to correspond with the increase in personnel in the organisation as well as the deployment of new ICT systems underpinning the unprecedented level of investment under the Modernisation and Renewal Programme. This requirement will be kept under review with An Garda Síochána.

### **Court Accommodation Refurbishment**

119. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his Department has received a structural engineer's report for the essential remedial work on Ballinamore courthouse, County Leitrim; if this report has been supplied to the Courts Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44098/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts, including the provision of accommodation for court sittings, is the responsibility of the Courts Service which is independent in exercising its functions.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that work was due to be undertaken earlier this year on the roof of Ballinamore courthouse. The Courts Service has further informed me that the Office of Public Works advised that a report on the structure of the building is required before any work could commence.

As previously advised in my reply to parliamentary question No. 194 of 10 October 2017, the Courts Service is still awaiting a structural engineer's report on the building which will inform the refurbishment process.

### **State Pathology Service**

120. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 116 of 4 October 2017, if officials in the Office of the State Pathologist are not accountable to his Department; and if the chief State pathologist is equally not accountable to him or his Department. [44104/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** All bodies which operate under the aegis of my Department agree governance and accountability arrangements with the Department, including written governance agreements, in line with the requirements of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies and in accordance with the Department's Corporate Governance Framework. Such arrangements help to ensure that appropriate corporate governance is in place in State bodies and that the citizen receives good value in the expenditure of public funds. However, such arrangements do not impinge on the operational independence of bodies such as the Office of the State Pathologist. As I stated in my response to the Deputy's question of 4 October, 2017, the Office of the State Pathologist is independent in the operation of its functions, which is entirely right and proper in light of the very important role it plays in the investigation and prosecution of serious crimes.

### **Garda Deployment**



121. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí stationed in Athlone, Mullingar, Moate and Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44178/17]

122. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí stationed in counties Westmeath and Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44179/17]

123. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí stationed in County Roscommon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44180/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 121 to 123, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

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 has been provided for the recruitment of 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan in train in An Garda Síochána. Funding has also been provided for the recruitment of 300 Garda Reserves.

I 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.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the strength of the Roscommon/Longford Division, on 31 August 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 305 with 9 Garda Reserves and 29 civilians attached to the Division. The Athlone, Mullingar and Moate Garda stations form part of the Westmeath Division. The strength of the Westmeath Division on 31 August 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 267 with 13 Reserves and 23 civilians. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

I am further informed by the Commissioner, that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, close to 1,400 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide with 10 and 27 being assigned to the Roscommon/Longford and Westmeath Divisions respectively. 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



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deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division, including the Roscommon/Longford and the Westmeath Divisions in the coming years.

For the Deputy's information I have set out in the table, as provided by the Commissioner, the number of gardaí assigned to the Roscommon/Longford and the Westmeath Garda Divisions as of 31 August 2017 the latest date for which figures are readily available.

Strength of the Roscommon/Longford Division 31 August 2017

DIVISION	STATION	TOTAL
CASTLEREA	BALLAGHADERREEN	10
	BALLINLOUGH	2
	BOYLE	26
	CASTLEREA	40
	ELPHIN	2
	FRENCHPARK	2
	KEADUE	1
	ROOSKY	3
	STROKESTOWN	5
	TULSK	2
	TOTAL	93
GRANARD	DRUMLISH	2
	EDGEWORTHSTOWN	11
	GRANARD	32
	SMEAR	1
TOTAL	46	
LONGFORD	BALLYMAHON	8
	KENAGH	1
	LANESBORO	6
	LONGFORD	73
TOTAL	88	
ROSCOMMON	ATHLEAGUE	1
	CLONARK	6
	ROSCOMMON	71
	TOTAL	78
ROSCOMMON / LONGFORD TOTAL		305

Strength of the Westmeath Division 31 August 2017

DIVISION	STATION	TOTAL
ATHLONE	ATHLONE	76
	BALLYMORE	1
	GLASSON	2
	KILBEGGAN	2
	MOATE	13
TOTAL	94	
MULLINGAR	BALLYNACARGY	2
	CASTLEPOLLARD	3
	DELVIN	8
	KILLUCAN	4
	KINNEGAD	5

DIVISION	STATION	TOTAL
	MULLINGAR	145
	MULTYFARNHAM	1
	ROCHFORTBRIDGE	5
	TOTAL	173
WESTMEATH TOTAL		267

### Closed-Circuit Television Systems Provision

124. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if applications to a scheme (details supplied) cannot be processed until a new Garda Commissioner is appointed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44183/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will be aware that the Community-based CCTV grant-aid Scheme was launched by my Department in April 2017 to assist community groups in the establishment of CCTV systems in their local areas.

A key requirement of the Scheme is that the proposal must have the authorisation of the Garda Commissioner in accordance with Section 38 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005.

The Deputy will also be aware that, in accordance with the provisions of section 32 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005, I appointed Deputy Commissioner Dónall Ó Cualáin Acting Commissioner with full powers following the retirement on 10 September 2017 of the Garda Commissioner.

In these circumstances, there is no impediment which would prevent the authorisation of any CCTV application should it fulfil the eligibility criteria for funding under the Scheme.

Full details of the Scheme, including guidelines, application forms, code of practice and other relevant documentation are available to download from my Department's website - [www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie).

I am very keen to ensure that groups take full advantage of the available funding and I would strongly encourage interested groups to utilise the Scheme. Guidance is available from my officials to provide any clarifications required in relation to the Scheme.

### Legislative Measures

125. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on the progress of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017; the statistics to back up the progress in terms of enforcement and support for victims; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44236/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 was passed by the Houses of the Oireachtas on 14th February 2017. Much of the Act was commenced on 27th March 2017 and work is ongoing to ensure that the remaining sections of the Act are commenced as soon as practicable.

Due to the recent enactment of the Bill, the operational needs of adapting crime recording systems to record new crimes, and the standard for statistical reports to be produced a number of months after the period recorded, statistics are as yet unavailable.

I believe that support for victims of crime is essential. To that end, a number of offices within my Department provided funding to organisations supporting victims of crime. So far, in 2017, the Victims of Crime Office has allocated funding of just over €1.7m to organisations supporting victims of crime, €209,000 of which went to organisations supporting victims of sexual crime. This was augmented by funding from Cosc, the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence, who provided €40,000 towards supports for victims of sexual crimes. The Anti-Human Trafficking Unit in my Department has also provided €260,000 to date in 2017 to Ruhama. Ruhama deals primarily with women affected by prostitution and other forms of commercial sexual exploitation.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy also that I expect the Victims of Crime Bill 2015, which will give legislative effect to the EU Victims Directive, to complete its passage through the Houses of the Oireachtas in the coming days.

### **Garda Operations**

126. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the success of Garda operations targeting rural burglary gangs; and his plans to further reassure persons living in fear. [44237/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I want to assure the Deputy that I am very much aware of the impact of crime on rural communities, including the serious damage done by organised gangs who target rural areas to engage in burglary and other property-related crime.

The success of the Garda measures to tackle burglary being implemented through Operation Thor is borne out by latest available CSO crime figures which show a very significant decline in property related crime. It is encouraging to note that since the launch of Operation Thor in late 2015, the CSO burglary figures have shown a significant 30% decrease in burglary for the twelve months of 2016 when compared to 2015.

As the Deputy is aware, Operation Thor involves a broad range of activities to tackle organised crime gangs and other prolific offenders as well as working with communities to prevent crime. This comprehensive operation is supported by the enhanced Government investment in Garda resources, including an allocation of almost €100 million for Garda overtime in 2017. We have also invested heavily in the Garda fleet, with over 720 new vehicles coming on stream since the start of 2015 and a provision of €46 million for new Garda vehicles under the Capital Plan 2016-2021.

These additional investments in policing make it possible to maintain and extend a range of intensive policing operations, including the continued targeting of burglaries and related crime via Operation Thor.

Under Operation Thor we have seen over 83,260 targeted checkpoints and 61,580 crime prevention patrols nationwide. This concentrated policing activity has produced in the region of 5,540 arrests and 6,150 charges covering a range of offences which, in addition to burglary, have included handling stolen property, possession of firearms and drugs offences.

This Government has also made it a particular priority to strengthen our legislative provisions through the enactment of the Criminal Justice (Burglary of Dwellings) Act 2015 which is targeted at repeat burglars who have previous convictions and who are charged with multiple offences of residential burglary. This new legislation is now available to support the work which is being carried out by An Garda Síochána under Operation Thor.

The Programme for Government underlines the need for close engagement between An Garda Síochána and local communities. This is an essential feature of the strong community policing ethos which has long been central to policing in this jurisdiction. The Deputy will be aware that, as part of the overall strategy to oppose criminality, the Garda authorities pursue a range of partnerships with community stakeholders, including the farming organisations.

There are a range of partnership initiatives which have been established between An Garda Síochána and important rural-based organisations such as the Irish Farmers Association, Muintir na Tíre and other rural community organisations. These include the well established Community Alert Programme, which receives annual funding from my Department, as well as the work of the Metal Theft Forum, the Crimestoppers campaign highlighting the Theft of Live-stock, the Theftstop initiative in relation to farm equipment, and the highly successful Garda Text Alert Scheme.

Furthermore, I recently announced that an additional €100,000 was being made available to Text Alert Groups, registered with An Garda Síochána, to provide modest financial assistance with the running costs they incur each year. This Text Alert Rebate Scheme will be administered by Muintir na Tíre and Groups wishing to participate at the Scheme can find more details at [www.muintiir.ie](http://www.muintiir.ie).

An Garda Síochána's Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 places a strong emphasis on developing and supporting the community policing ethos of the organisation and enhancing the current delivery model so that Gardaí spend more time in the community, gaining public confidence and trust and providing a greater sense of security. It will result in the introduction of multi-skilled Community Policing Teams in every District. Community Policing Teams will be made-up of Gardaí from a number of different units who will work with the local community to prevent and detect crime. Undoubtedly, the ongoing recruitment process will support all Garda activities and will enhance the provision of effective Community Policing throughout the country.

Underpinning all of these measures is the Government's commitment to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime. The Government is pursuing its plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians. In 2017, funding has been provided for the recruitment of 800 Garda recruits, up to 500 civilians and approximately 300 members of the Garda reserve. These appointments will support the wide ranging reform plan which is in train in An Garda Síochána, and benefit policing services for all communities, whether in rural or urban areas.

## **Prisoner Welfare**

127. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to improve prison accountability by introducing a prisoner complaint mechanism and the ratification of OPCAT as a gesture; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44238/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** A prisoner complaints system is already in place. It was introduced in November 2012 based on a model recommended by the late Inspector of Prisons, Judge Michael Reilly. The system is categorised according to the nature and seriousness of the complaint. This can range from the most serious 'Category A' complaint through to a Category D complaint. A complaint in the 'A' category, such as assault, is examined by investigators from outside the Prison Service to ensure an effective and

impartial investigation. A complaint in the 'D' category would relate to maladministration by professionals providing services to prisoners such as doctors, dentists etc.

The late Judge Reilly, who was independent of Government in his post of Inspector, carried out a review of this system in June 2016 and made a number of recommendations. This report entitled "Review, Evaluation and Analysis of the Operation of the present Irish Prison Service Complaints Procedure" is available on my Department's website - [www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie).

One of the key recommendations in the Inspector's report is that prisoners' complaints should be subject to review by the Ombudsman, who would also be able to deal with complaints directly in the case of undue delay. This recommendation was accepted and my officials and officials from the Irish Prison Service are in advanced discussions with the Ombudsman's office with the aim of establishing an effective complaints system for prisoners. Further measures recommended in the Inspector's report need to be in place - such as development of the necessary IT infrastructure - before the Irish Prison Service will be in a position to implement the revised procedures. Some amendment to secondary legislation may be required as well but it is not envisaged that primary legislation will be required.

The revision of the prisoner complaints system is not directly linked to the ratification of the UN's Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT). Preparatory work on this ratification has been on-going for some time. At the end of 2015, the Department of Justice and Equality initiated a consultation process with civil society on the ratification of the Protocol in Ireland. Following an open policy debate including with NGOs, the academic community as well as statutory agencies, the Department circulated a revised consultation paper. This process was concluded in May 2017 and the contributions made will inform the development of a General Scheme for the Inspection of Places of Detention Bill, which will include provisions to ratify OPCAT.

Among the suggestions made by respondents was that a full scoping exercise be carried out on how OPCAT would operate across the various places of detention in the State. This involves consultations with a number of Government Departments which are already underway. The Department is also continuing its engagement with those who contributed submissions on the matter, building on the scoping work already initiated and in particular, the research carried out by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. All this work is informing the drafting of the General Scheme of the Inspection of Places of Detention Bill. When the draft legislation is sufficient advanced, I will seek Government approval of the Heads of a Bill. Subject to this approval, the Bill will then be submitted to the Oireachtas for pre-legislative scrutiny and the other necessary steps before the Bill becomes law.

## **Parole Boards**

128. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to establish a fully independent parole board on a statutory basis; his further plans to implement the recommendations of the strategic review on penal policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44239/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy is aware, the Penal Policy Review Group (PPRG) was established in 2012 in line with the recommendations of the Thornton Hall Project Review Group, to conduct a wide-ranging strategic review of penal policy. The report of the PPRG titled 'Strategic Review of Penal Policy' dated July 2014 was published on my Department's website ([www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie)). In November 2014, the report of the Group was submitted to Government, one of the recommendations of which was that an

implementation and oversight mechanism should be set up.

The Implementation and Oversight Group was established in early 2015, to oversee implementation of the PPRG's recommendations. Its primary function is to meet and report to the Minister, on a six monthly basis, on the implementation status of the recommendations of the PPRG. The Group has submitted four reports on progress to date. Three reports are currently available on my Department's website and the fourth report will be published shortly. These reports outline the timelines expected for the implementation of each recommendation made by the Penal Policy Review Group and the current implementation status of each of those recommendations.

The PPRG report identified 43 recommendations for reform of penal policy and this currently forms the blueprint for penal reform to which I am fully committed. Progress has been made in terms of some of the recommendations of the PPRG - for example, the pursuit of alternatives to custody, interagency working between the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service and the use of structured temporary release programmes such as the Community Return Programme and the Community Support Scheme.

Recommendation 31 of the Report was that a Parole Board should be established on a statutory footing with the power to make decisions on sentences.

Following the publication of the report work commenced on a General Scheme of a Bill on the establishment of a Parole Board on a statutory basis.

In April 2017, the Government agreed to focus on the Private Members Parole Bill 2016 that had been brought forward by Deputy Jim O'Callaghan and to work in partnership with Deputy O'Callaghan to achieve this objective. It was also agreed that appropriate amendments to the Bill would be brought forward in consultation with Deputy O'Callaghan. The Bill passed Committee Stage in Dáil Éireann on 24 April 2017 and work on preparing amendments for Report Stage is ongoing.

The Bill provides for establishing a Parole Board on a statutory basis to determine releases from prison of long sentence offenders. The Bill sets out the criteria to be considered in deciding on the release of prisoners, which include risk to public safety and the extent to which release will facilitate the prisoner's reintegration into society.

## **Garda Investigations**

129. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the conduct of An Garda Síochána in relation to a domestic violence case (details supplied) that relates to the killing of a member of An Garda Síochána in Omeath, County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44264/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The tragic events at Omeath on 11 October 2015 caused suffering, grief and distress to the victims, their families and their friends. Our sympathies are with them. I recall, in particular, Garda Tony Golden, who lost his life doing his duty serving his community, and the young woman who suffered such trauma and serious injury that day.

The events of that day and matters related to them are the subject of review processes being carried out by the Garda Authorities. This is in addition to the Garda investigation that is taking place into the shootings themselves. These investigation and review processes are ongoing.



In addition, the Deputy will be aware that the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission is carrying out independent investigations into matters related to the shootings.

I am sure the Deputy will agree that we should not prejudge the outcome of those investigations. We should allow these processes to be completed in order that the matters referred to by the Deputy can be addressed and the truth established independently.

### **Visa Applications**

130. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason SOIN applications are taking 12 months to process; the steps that are being taken to reduce this time; the options available to a person who wants to work while waiting for their application to be processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44081/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that while the Spouse of Irish National Unit endeavours to process applications as quickly as possible, processing times may vary due to a number of factors, such as the number of applications on hands, individual circumstances, the complexity of applications, whether further information is required, and the resources available.

I should point out that the Spouse of Irish National Unit, within INIS, process applications for persons who have no current permission to reside in the State. This is an important distinction as it should be noted that where an individual enters the State, having initially obtained the correct visa, or where they seek to register their SOIN related immigration permission while ‘in permission’, they may be registered at their local Immigration Office ‘over the counter’ in a much simpler procedure.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the onus is on the applicant to remain in permission. Any person who contravenes subsections (2), (3) or (4) of Section 9 of the Immigration Act 2004 is guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding €3,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or both.

I am also advised by the INIS that their practices and procedures have been, and continue to be, reviewed in order to reduce the time it takes to process an application, e.g. the introduction of new application forms and explanatory leaflets. The Deputy may be interested to know that following the introduction of an in-depth application form some time ago, the standard initial permission for such applications was increased from 12 months to 36 months in most instances.

Furthermore, I am advised that if an applicant wishes to work while their application is being processed they may consider applying for a work permit from the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

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.

### **Medicinal Products Licensing**

131. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Health if he will request the Health Products Regulatory Authority to license pembrolizumab for use in the treatment of fine cell neuroendocrine rectal cancer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44084/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Pembrolizumab is authorised for the treatment of a number of cancers, including melanoma, non-small cell lung cancer and Hodgkin lymphoma. These authorisations were issued by the European Commission, following a recommendation from the Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP), the scientific committee of the European Medicines Agency (EMA). The Health Products Regulatory Authority is a member of this committee.

Pembrolizumab is not currently authorised for fine cell neuroendocrine rectal cancer. In order to achieve this clinical indication, the company marketing pembrolizumab would need to submit data to the EMA for review by the CHMP. If the data were supportive of the safety and efficacy of pembrolizumab in this indication, an amended authorisation could be issued by the European Commission.

It is important to note that the Minister for Health has no role in the authorisation process for medicines in Ireland.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

132. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if there will be no undue delays or rearranging of an appointment in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44087/17]

**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.

### **Abortion Services Provision**

133. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the analysis that has been undertaken regarding the cost of introducing free access to abortion services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44099/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Deputy may be aware, officials in my Department are giving consideration to a range of scenarios that may arise if there was to be a change to Article 40.3.3 of the Constitution, including the cost and access issues referred to by the Deputy. I am committed to ensuring an informed Oireachtas and public debate on the Eighth Amendment when it comes before the Houses, and in that regard all relevant information will be made available when the Oireachtas is debating the issue.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances Provision**

134. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a wheelchair which has been approved. [44101/17]

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

### **Medical Card Eligibility**

135. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health if a person (details supplied) is entitled to a medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44120/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Medical card provision is solely based on financial assessment. In accordance with the provisions of the Health Act 1970 (as amended), eligibility for a medical card is determined by the HSE. The Act obliges the HSE to assess whether a person is unable, without due hardship, to arrange general practitioner services for himself or herself and his or her family, having regard to his or her overall financial position and reasonable expenditure and every application must be assessed on that basis. Under the legislation, having a particular illness, in itself, does not establish eligibility for a medical card and therefore, the medical conditions of applicants for this scheme are not monitored on that basis. Where the applicant's income is within the income guidelines, a medical card or GP visit card will be awarded.

Every effort is made by the HSE, within the framework of the legislation, to support applicants in applying for a medical card and, in particular, to take full account of the difficult circumstances in the case of applicants who may be in excess of the income guidelines. It should be noted, in certain circumstances, the HSE may exercise discretion and grant a medical card, even though an applicant exceeds his or her income threshold, where he or she faces difficult financial circumstances, such as extra costs arising from an illness. Social and medical issues are considered when determining whether undue hardship exists for an individual accessing general practitioner or other medical services. The HSE affords applicants the opportunity to furnish supporting information documentation to fully take account of all the relevant circumstances that may benefit them in the assessment, including medical evidence of cost and necessary expenses.

### **Health Services Funding**

136. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Health the funding allocated to private rehabilitation beds and nursing homes from the health budget due to lack of bed spaces in the National Rehabilitation Hospital. [44122/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Disability Services Provision**

137. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if he will address a matter (details

supplied); the position of the person on the waiting list for the two rehabilitation units outlined; if the appointment will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44130/17]

**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.

### **Respite Care Services Funding**

138. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the funding that has been made available to address the respite crisis in County Louth further to the announcement of an extra €646 million in funding being made available in the health budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44132/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** I am pleased to say that overall funding for services for older people will increase in 2018. We are in a position to further strengthen supports for our older people, particularly to facilitate speedier discharge from acute hospitals over the winter period. The quantum of service to be provided will be outlined in the Health Service Executive's National Service Plan for 2018, which is currently being prepared by the Executive. I will be in a position to update the Deputy on the specifics of the Service Plan when it is finalised.

### **Primary Care Centres Provision**

139. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the status of a project (details supplied); when this project will proceed to the next stage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44133/17]

140. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the status of a project (details supplied); when this project will proceed to the next stage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44134/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 139 and 140 together.

As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

### **Home Care Packages Provision**

141. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health if a home care package can be improved for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44138/17]

**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 Homes Support Scheme Data**

142. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health the amount in loans due to the HSE under the ancillary State support scheme; the amount to be collected under the scheme for each of the next ten years; the arrangements the HSE has with the Revenue Commissioners that act as the collecting agent for the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44139/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances Applications Data**

143. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons on waiting lists for wheelchairs waiting 0 to three months, three to six months, six to 12 months and longer than 12 months, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44141/17]

**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.

### **HSE Data**

144. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Health the procurement process used by the HSE to acquire wheelchairs; the names of the suppliers of wheelchairs including specialist wheelchairs to the HSE; the types of wheelchairs supplied to the HSE; the cost to the HSE of each type of wheelchair; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44142/17]

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

### **Ambulance Service Staff**

145. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the number of ambulance and associated personnel serving in each of the Sligo, Manorhamilton, Carrick-on-Shannon and Boyle stations; the number of newly qualified ambulance and associated personnel assigned to each of the stations in 2016 and to date 2017; the number of newly qualified ambulance and associated personnel in 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44143/17]

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

### **Medicinal Products Availability**

146. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to make long acting reversible contraception available to all medical card holders; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44145/17]

**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.

### **Mental Health Services**

147. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the status of the work of the national task force on youth mental health; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44163/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** The work of the Taskforce is now complete. Subject to Government approval of its recommendations, the intention is to launch and publish the Taskforce report in November. The launch will be supported with info-graphics targeted at children and young people that will reflect the themes emerging. These Info-graphics will be launched on the various task force member websites and through media messaging to ensure wide coverage.

### **Mental Health Services Funding**

148. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health the amount of the additional funding announced for mental health services in budget 2018 that will be allocated to the child and adolescent mental health services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44164/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** Budget 2018 provided significant additional funding for mental health, which means that HSE funding for this key care programme will increase from around €853 million in 2017 to €912 million next year. New service initiatives on Child and Adolescent Mental Health services are being progressed in the context of finalising both the overall HSE Service Plan 2018, and the more detailed regional Operational Plan for Mental Health. These will be published by the HSE in the near future.

### **General Practitioner Services**

149. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the online or video general practitioner services operating here; the regulations governing ehealth, telehealth and teleconsultations; the standard of best practice these companies must abide by; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44173/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I assume that the Deputy is referring to the eHealth related telehealth and teleconsultations services that are remotely delivered using online means as opposed to a traditional face-to-face consultation.

The importance of, and the opportunity for, eHealth or digital health to support health care reform and the delivery of a modern health care system has been recognised for quite some time. In 2013, my Department published an eHealth strategy, which outlined a way forward to



improve the deployment of information technology to support health care efficiency and patient safety and care.

There has been some progress made since the publication of the strategy including the establishment of the Office of the Chief Information Officer and eHealth Ireland, the publication of the Knowledge and Information Plan, the establishment of the eHealth ecosystem, the development of the Electronic Health Record business case and the implementation of the Individual Health Identifier (IHI).

The Sláintecare report advocates the “*Continued strong support of the e-health strategy*” and in particular ensuring the necessary funding for the timely roll-out of an EHR system. The report also emphasised the importance of health information and eHealth as critical enablers to implement the change required to deliver an integrated, high quality health system.

The delivery of eHealth in Ireland effectively means the digital transformation of a health-care model that exploits digital infrastructure to enable commonly shared capabilities and access to services and information throughout the health system. eHealth has the capacity to provide the enabling infrastructure and the technology needed to facilitate the wider use of technology to support patient care in any health care setting. New technologies facilitate different approaches to the treatment of patients, offering alternative health care models of integrated care that can contribute to better outcomes and achieve cost efficiencies in the delivery of health services.

There is emerging evidence that telemedicine/teleconsultation can be implemented to support an integrated healthcare approach. Teleconsultations can provide benefits in certain circumstances, such as the provision of care in remote locations or for chronically ill patients and provide care in alternative settings convenient for the patient. Such consultations, as currently available, can provide alternative channels of service to enhance patient choice. Where these services are offered they must support current best clinical practice and patient safety care protocols and should only be provided where direct patient access on a face to face basis is not readily available or suitable. In delivering remote health services, providers must also ensure the integrity of patient data, as required by current data protection law and the forthcoming implementation of the EU General Data Protection Regulation in May 2018. There will also be a need for guidance and clinical protocols around the appropriate use of teleconsultations to be developed as well as retraining and education of staff and patients.

While my Department is aware that some general practitioners and providers are offering video and online services these are in general enhancements and alternatives to current provision of existing services. Any deployment of telemedicine/teleconsultation in primary or other care settings must be provided on the basis of ensuring that the same level of care and treatments as are also available from non digital based services. While some teleconsultation solutions are currently being offered in the private health sector, GPs are private contractors and my Department does not routinely collect information on teleconsultation services that may be offered by particular GPs or private companies. This emerging area of service provision will be closely monitored by my Department.

### **Assisted Human Reproduction Services Provision**

150. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health when the new support scheme for IVF will be available; the assistance available until then; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44198/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** 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 you 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.

### **Medical Card Drugs Availability**

151. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the reason medication pain plasters were taken off the medical card; and if they can be reinstated onto the list of items covered under the medical card. [44228/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Medicines play a vital role in improving the health of Irish patients. Securing access to existing and new and innovative medicines is a key objective of the health service. However, the challenge is to do this in an affordable and sustainable manner. The medicines bill for the community drugs schemes – primarily the GMS, Long Term Illness and Drugs Payment schemes and the High Tech Arrangement – is forecast at just over €1.7 billion in 2017.

To ensure patients receive the highest quality care, resources invested in medicines must be used efficiently and effectively. This requires an integrated approach to secure best value for money for all treatments, greater efficiencies in the supply chain and the use of the most cost-effective treatments.

Lidocaine 5% medicated plaster (Versatis) is licensed for the symptomatic relief of neuropathic pain associated with previous herpes zoster (shingles) infection, known as post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN), in adults. It was reimbursed in the community drugs schemes from 2010. The projected budget impact was low due to the specific licensed indication but total expenditure has increased significantly, from €9.4 million in 2012 to over €30 million in 2016, mainly from off-license use for pain not associated with shingles. Currently, over 25,000 patients receive this item.

An HSE Medicines Management Programme (MMP) review of Versatis highlighted that the clinical evidence for its use in PHN is limited due to lack of comparative data and its value is uncertain for all other types of pain. The National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics estimated that, in Ireland, between 5-10% of prescribing of this product is for the licensed indication of PHN.

Following the MMP review, the HSE introduced a new reimbursement system for Versatis

from 1 September 2017. This process supports the appropriate use of Versatis, ensuring that PHN patients continue to receive this treatment. The HSE estimates that this protocol will reduce expenditure on this product by approximately 90%.

Under the protocol, all patients who receive antivirals for shingles are automatically approved for Versatis for three months. No action is required by GPs and the patient's pharmacy is notified of his or her approval status.

All patients who currently use Versatis have been identified and automatically registered on the HSE-PCRS system for three months and will continue to receive the treatment from their pharmacy until 30 November 2017. However, from 1 December 2017, non-shingles patients will no longer get Versatis under the community drugs schemes. The HSE has produced information leaflets for patients and advised GPs on treatment alternatives.

In exceptional circumstances, the product may be approved for supply through the community schemes for unlicensed indications. GPs apply for reimbursement for unlicensed indications through the online system. The MMP reviews applications before a decision is made and communicated to the GP.

Full details of the Versatis review are available on the HSE website at <http://hse.ie/eng/about/Who/clinical/natclinprog/medicinemanagementprogramme/yourmedicines/lidocaine-plaster/lidocaine-medicated-plaster.html>.

This decision is a matter for the HSE. However, I fully support the objectives of the HSE Medicines Management Programme.

### **Respite Care Services Provision**

152. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health his plans to put all measures in place to reinstate nine respite care beds at a community hospital (details supplied) without delay to ensure that those in need of respite care can avail of same; if his attention has been drawn to the effect this is having on those who were scheduled to take up respite care in view of the fact they have been offered an allowance towards the use of alternative respite accommodation which is not suitable for many of the respite patients, mainly those suffering from dementia; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that the cancelled respite care at this hospital will also have an effect on the families of those who were scheduled for respite care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44230/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Medical Aids and Appliances Expenditure**

153. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the funding allocation to the HSE for the purpose of providing aids and appliances to enable elderly persons to remain living in their own homes; the items covered by this funding; and the waiting list for each CHO. [44233/17]

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

## Medical Products

154. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who have received a transvaginal mesh implant procedure through the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44268/17]

155. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of transvaginal mesh implant procedures carried out here, by year, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44269/17]

156. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the number of women who received transvaginal mesh implant procedures and who are now taking legal action against the HSE or the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44270/17]

157. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when his attention was drawn to the side effects and complications of transvaginal mesh implant procedures; the steps he took to address the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44271/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 154 to 157, inclusive, together.

While the detailed information requested by the Deputy may not be available, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly to provide you with whatever information is available.

In relation to the broader issue, the Deputy may wish to note that the role of the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) is to protect and enhance public and animal health by regulating medicines, medical devices and other health products.

Most medical devices are initially assessed and approved by a separate organisation called a 'notified body' which approves them to be placed on the market. A medical device that has been approved will bear a "CE mark" which indicates it meets the basic requirements for safety and effectiveness under European law. The HPRA is responsible for monitoring the safety of medical devices in Ireland after they are placed on the market.

The HPRA operate a national reporting system for medical devices and encourages users of devices to report incidents or problems associated with their use through the HPRA website or by contacting the manufacturer directly.

## HSE Properties

158. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health his Department's timeframe for the refurbishment to the HSE owned property on Drogheda Street, Monasterevin, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44281/17]

159. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the delays that prevented the completion of the refurbishment of the HSE owned property on Drogheda Street, Monasterevin, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44282/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 158 and 159 together.

I understand that the HSE issued a reply directly to you on 6th October 2017 regarding this property.

### **Primary Care Centres Provision**

160. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the progress on the primary care unit in Athy, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44283/17]

161. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the primary care unit in Athy, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44284/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 160 and 161 together.

As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

### **Health Services**

162. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health the supports in place for a centre (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44285/17]

**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.

### **Disease Management**

163. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44287/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Lyme disease (also known as Lyme borreliosis) is an infection caused by a spiral-shaped bacterium called *Borrelia burgdorferi*. It is transmitted to humans by bites from ticks infected with the bacteria. The Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) of the HSE has extensive information concerning Lyme disease on its website [www.hpsc.ie/a-z/vectorborne/lymedisease/](http://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/vectorborne/lymedisease/).

Lyme borreliosis can be asymptomatic or have a range of clinical presentations. Current best advice is that diagnosis should be made only after careful examination of the patient's clinical history, physical findings, laboratory evidence and exposure risk evaluation. Exposure to ticks prior to disease manifestations is necessary for the diagnosis of Lyme borreliosis. Since an awareness or recollection of a tick-bite is not always present, however, this should not exclude the diagnosis of Lyme borreliosis. Later stages require the use of antibody detection tests (or advanced DNA detection techniques). Testing for Lyme Disease is undertaken in most of the larger hospitals in Ireland. In undertaking Lyme testing, it is essential that the results are interpreted in the light of the clinical condition of the patient. If the result of this initial screen is equivocal, the patient's samples are referred to the U.K.'s Rare and Imported Pathogens Laboratory (RIPL) Service of Public Health England Porton which uses a two-tier system recommended by American and European authorities. This involves a screening serological test followed by a confirmatory serological test.

Lyme disease can be very successfully treated using common antibiotics. These antibiot-



ics are effective at clearing the rash and helping to prevent the development of complications. Antibiotics are generally given for up to three weeks. As testing in Ireland is confirmed by the RIPL there is no requirement to send samples to other facilities in the UK.

### **Greyhound Industry**

164. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the persons who currently work in the greyhound industry, in tabular form. [44107/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Bord na gCon is a commercial State body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958, chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry.

Bord na gCon is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Accordingly, the information being requested by the Deputy has been forwarded to Bord na gCon for direct reply.

### **Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments**

165. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he will take to ensure that an ANC payment due to a person (details supplied) is issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44118/17]

**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 12 May 2017. Processing of this application is now completed and payment will issue directly to the nominated bank account of the person named shortly.

### **Afforestation Programme**

166. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to remove the 20% rule on planting unenclosed land and replace it with a system that assesses productivity and environmental suitability for forestry; the evidence used to calculate the 20% figure; and if other European countries have such a rule. [44126/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** In 2010, a change was made in Ireland's scheme rules that limited the amount of unenclosed land in any one afforestation application to 20%. Unenclosed land is usually found in upland areas and is generally less fertile than enclosed or improved land found at lower elevations. There is compelling evidence surrounding the difference in productivity of tree species planted on unenclosed and enclosed land. This measure became known as 'the 20% rule'. The 20% rule had an effect on increasing the average production potential of sites being put forward for afforestation, as it stipulates that each site required 80% enclosed and improved land. It also acted as a means of reducing the amount of environmentally sensitive land being submitted, as much of the poorer land is environmentally sensitive.

To better inform the discussion on these issues, the Department produced two documents, the first related to productivity assessment informed by Teagasc research and the second related



to environmental sensitivities following a consultation process.

The new Land Types for Afforestation document was launched in March 2016 and introduced a new approach to land classification for bare land. It is based on scientific work centred on the scoring of vegetation from a productivity perspective. The use of ground vegetation to assess the suitability of land is a long established method of assessing the suitability of sites for afforestation and as an aid to tree species selection. A range of indicator values has been derived for plants found in the UK and Ireland. There is a strong relationship between the combined R (Reaction) and N (Nitrogen) value and site productivity. Using this new system to evaluate site productivity, plants are given combined R+N values and are then weighted by their occurrence to get an overall plot average. Higher values are associated with more fertile sites. This new approach to classifying bare land for planting and the new Environmental Requirements launched in December 2016 are now being implemented.

Given that we are now successfully implementing the two documents referred to above, we now intend lifting the 20% rule. My Department is now engaging with the European Commission with the aim of removing the 20% rule and has met with DG ENVIRON and DG AGRI in December 2016. A final position has yet to be reached by the Commission and a further meeting with the Commission is scheduled for November 2017.

While I am not aware of all the rules of all Member States, each Member State that grant aids afforestation must apply minimum environmental requirements as set out in REGULATION (EU) No 1305/2013 on support for rural development and in the EU's Guidelines for State aid in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas.

### Afforestation Programme

167. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers and non-farmers participating in planting schemes under the forest programme 2014 to 2020. [44127/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department publishes annual afforestation statistics which are available on its website. Those statistics include numbers of farmers and non-farmers who participate in afforestation each year. Those numbers are set out in the following table, for 2014 to 2016, which are the most recent available figures.

It should be noted that the non-farmer category is primarily made up of recently retired farmers or the family members of the landowner in question. On that basis I am satisfied that the vast bulk of the investment under the programme is delivered to, and remains in, rural Ireland.

Year	Farmer	Non-Farmer
2014	950	49
2015	852	130
2016	652	357

### Alternative Energy Projects

168. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the criteria required for the leasing of agricultural land for solar panel use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44177/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I welcomed the Minister for Finance's announcement in the Budget to provide for the leasing of agricultural land for solar panels to be classified as qualifying agricultural activity for the purposes of specific Capital Acquisitions Tax and Capital Gains Tax reliefs. This initiative, which I sought in my annual agri-taxation Budget submission, is subject to the panels covering no more than 50 per cent of the total farm holding. It will support diversification, expand the generation of renewable energy and help tackle climate change.

Further detail on the measure will be provided in the Finance Bill.

### **Fish Farming**

169. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 167 of 4 October 2017, if there was a disease outbreak or other incident resulting in extensive fish mortalities at a site (details supplied) previous to the recent jellyfish strike; the date his Department and Inland Fisheries Ireland were notified of the disease outbreak or incident; the number of mortalities from this disease outbreak or incident; and the condition and number of the remaining fish at the time of the jellyfish strike. [44185/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department has been advised by the Marine Institute that the aquaculture site referred to by the Deputy experienced a disease outbreak in advance of the jellyfish strike.

On 21 September my Department received an inquiry from Inland Fisheries Ireland concerning large quantities of dead fish at the site referred to by the Deputy. Inquiries by my Department's Marine Engineering Division indicated that substantial mortalities had occurred.

The information requested by the Deputy in relation to the number of mortalities may be commercially sensitive and is also under consideration by my Department as part of a statutory process. Therefore it would not be appropriate for me to comment further pending completion of this process.

### **Fish Farming**

170. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the compensation fund for biotoxin events in aquaculture provided by the State can be accessed for the recent mortalities through jellyfish strikes on salmon farms; and the extent, duration and rationale of the fund. [44186/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Ireland's €240 million European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Operational Programme 2014-20 provides €29.6 million to support the sustainable development of the aquaculture sector, in accordance with the 2015 National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Aquaculture Development. This includes a €2 million fund to aid mollusc farmers affected by suspension of harvesting of molluscs during periods of raised biotoxin levels.

In accordance with article 36 of the EMFF Regulation (508/2014), aid is available only for losses suffered by mollusc farmers arising from harvesting suspensions due to toxin-producing plankton that have persisted for more than 4 consecutive months. The loss resulting from the suspension must amount to more than 25% of the annual turnover of the business, calculated on the average turnover over the 3 preceding calendar years. Aid is prioritised for operators affect-

ed by the longest suspensions and is limited to a maximum total aid to all farmers of €500,000 per year. Bord Iascaigh Mhara administers the Scheme through targeted calls for applications in areas affected by closures lasting more than 4 months. It is a matter for BIM to determine if a call for applications is to be initiated. No calls have been initiated to date.

As the Scheme applies only to mollusc farmers, it is not available to salmon farmers for losses howsoever arising.

### **Agriculture Scheme Eligibility**

171. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) did not qualify for a single farm payment since inheriting a 30 acre farm in 2014. [44202/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** In order to be eligible for an automatic allocation of entitlements under the Basic Payment Scheme, a farmer must have been eligible to receive a direct payment under the 2013 Single Payment Scheme. The person named commenced farming under the herd as supplied in September 2014 and prior to this he held a separate herd number from 12 June 2012 until 31 August 2014. He did not hold payment entitlements under either of these herd numbers. As no Single Payment Scheme application was submitted by the person named in 2013 he does not hold an automatic allocation right for payment entitlements under the Basic Payment Scheme.

My Department has no record of having received an application to transfer payment entitlements or to transfer a payment entitlement allocation right by inheritance to the person named.

The person named has submitted applications under the 'young farmer' category of the 2017 National Reserve and the Young Farmers Scheme. My Department has requested the submission of additional documentation required to further process his applications. Once the relevant documentation has been received processing of the applications will be finalised and the person named will be notified in writing regarding his eligibility under these schemes.

### **Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments**

172. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the issuing of a 2016 ANC payment to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44235/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** An application under the 2016 ANC Scheme was received from the person named on 6 April 2016.

Under the 2016 ANC Scheme, eligible applicants were required to meet a minimum stocking density of 0.15 livestock units per eligible forage hectare for a retention period of seven consecutive months and to maintain an annual average of 0.15 livestock units calculated over the twelve months of the scheme year. In addition, Sheep farmers are required to comply with EU Regulation 21/2004 and return an annual count of the sheep numbers on their holding by 29 January 2016 via the annual Sheep Census. For the purpose of the ANC Scheme, applicants are given an extension on this requirement and must submit their return by 16 May.

Examination of my Department's records confirm that the Sheep Census return in respect of the person named was not returned within the permitted time period in 2016. This has resulted in no payment issuing under the 2016 ANC scheme.

The person named has been notified of this decision and of their right to appeal this decision to the Agriculture Appeals Office.

### **Departmental Reports**

173. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when his Department will release a report (details supplied) on the economic assessment of the potential of harness racing in Ireland which has been completed since February 2017; if this can now be released with a view to implementing its recommendations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44259/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Indecon report to review the Irish harness racing sector is being examined by officials within my Department and its recommendations are under active consideration.

### **Young Farmers Scheme**

174. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of applications under the 2017 national reserve and young farmers scheme; the number of applications processed to date if not yet finalised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44263/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department has received 1,339 applications under the 2017 National Reserve and 9,308 applications under the 2017 Young Farmers Scheme. Processing of applications is at an advanced stage. My Department continues to engage with a number of applicants where outstanding documentation is required to finalise their applications and my Department is focussed on maximising the number of applications that will be finalised for the first payment date.

Payment to successful applicants under both schemes is scheduled to commence in early December 2017 following the payment of the balancing payments under the Basic Payment Scheme. These balancing payments are due to commence on 1 December.

### **Fisheries Protection**

175. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44290/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I am aware of the Irish Wildlife Trust's request to ban the practice of pair trawling in coastal areas in order to maintain the sprat population to the benefit of seabirds and marine life. Sprat is a short-lived species and an important prey fish for many marine species thus vital to the ocean food chain as well as an important source of income for inshore fishermen.

The central objective of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is to ensure that fishing and aquaculture activities are environmentally sustainable in the long term through the conservation and sustainable exploitation of marine biological resources and the management of fisheries and fleets exploiting such resources. Ireland is committed to ensuring the conservation of the seabirds and marine life around our coast through the Birds and Habitats Directive, among other instruments.

Sprat in Irish waters is not a species subject to fishing quotas or Total Allowable Catches established under EU regulation. Scientifically, relatively little is known about the sprat species. The International Council of the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) considers sprat to be a data limited stock which means that more detailed data is required in order to form a full understanding of the state of the stock.

Available scientific information is that sprat in Ireland spawn from January to June with a fishery normally taking place from October to Christmas. This is a fortuitous situation, allowing some degree of reproductive output as the fishery takes place after the fish have been able to spawn. The Marine Institute advise that there is no evidence that spawning sprat are or ever have been targeted in Irish fisheries nor is there evidence that sprat actually spawn inshore. That of course is not to deny that they are easily targeted inshore when they occur there.

In order to address the lack of accurate information in respect of the sprat stocks in the waters around Ireland, a three year research project, partially funded by industry, commenced in October 2014 and is now in its final stage, under the auspices of the Marine Institute in cooperation with the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology.

This project aims to develop an accurate and detailed understanding of the stock structure of sprat around Ireland. It will determine whether the sprat in Irish coastal waters is one stock or several separate stocks and it aims to increase our understanding of their role in the broader marine ecosystem. This data will in turn contribute to the ICES assessment of the vulnerability or otherwise of sprat in the waters around Ireland.

In addition to this research project, the Marine Institute is committed to working closely with Industry to obtain increased observer coverage in the sprat fisheries. A number of such observer trips have already taken place this month with more planned. The purpose of the observer scheme is twofold:

- To obtain biological information on the resource itself and on any other fishery bycatch, ie herring, juvenile mackerel, etc.

- To obtain information on any bycatch this fishery might have of protected, endangered and threatened species, under the European maritime and fisheries fund (EMFF) marine biodiversity scheme such as marine mammals, seabirds and listed fish species.

It is expected that these projects/observer schemes will allow for more intensive data collection and enhanced scientific knowledge on the sprat stock thus supporting any future management actions considered necessary including the issue of pair trawling.

## **Energy Schemes**

176. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress of the Shannon LNG project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44240/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The Programme for a Partnership Government makes clear that the Government remains supportive of the proposal to construct an LNG terminal near Ballylongford, County Kerry. The Government has and continues to support the project achieve the status of a Project of Common Interest (PCI) under European Regulation 347/2013 Trans European Energy Infrastructure.



It is important to note that the Shannon LNG project, to which the Deputy refers, is a commercial, private sector project, the implementation of which is ultimately the responsibility of the project promoters. Final investment decisions for the Shannon LNG project are a matter for the project promoters to take.

The Deputy may also wish to note that, in line with the Programme for Government, my Department, in conjunction with the Commission for Regulation of Utilities, Gas Networks Ireland and EirGrid, is in the process of examining Ireland's resilience to a long term gas disruption. The potential for LNG is part of this analysis. This study will inform the formulation of future policy measures to maintain the resilience of Ireland's gas and electricity networks and supply.

### **Fisheries Protection**

177. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans for the implementation of a hardship scheme for eel fishermen; when it is likely to be rolled out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44146/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne):** I refer to the reply to Question No 519 of 10 October.

The possibility of implementing support measures for eel fishermen remains under consideration.

Ireland's Eel Management Plan (EMP) under EU Regulation 1100/2007, which included a closure of commercial fishing, was approved by the European Commission in 2009. Ireland's EMP and its conservation measures were reviewed in 2012 and in 2015, in accordance with the EU Regulation. Both reviews involved an examination of the latest scientific data and the conservation measures, the results of which were the subject of public consultations.

In that context, I recognise fully the difficulty facing eel fishermen. However, there is no property right attaching to public eel licences. Notwithstanding, the possibility of implementing support measures for eel fishermen is a matter under consideration.

Both I and the Minister have also discussed the issue of eels with ESB Fisheries who are fishery owners in this context.

### **National Broadband Plan Implementation**

178. **Deputy Hildegard Naughton** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the upgrade of the broadband network in Shrule, County Mayo, will take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44229/17]

**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](http://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](http://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 townland of Shrule, Co Mayo comprises 101 premises and broadband coverage will be realised through a mix of predominantly commercial investment and the State led Intervention under the NBP. Of the 101 premises, 99 premises fall within areas where commercial telecommunications providers are either currently delivering, or have indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services. The remaining 2 premises will be part of the State led Intervention under the NBP.

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 roll out 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.

### **Dublin Bus Fleet**

179. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of additional buses that will be provided in Dublin in 2018 resulting from budget 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44288/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As the Deputy is aware, my Department provides annual funding to the National Transport Authority (NTA) for a rolling programme of bus replacement and refurbishment of the Dublin Bus PSO fleet. The extent to which this funding is used to replace older vehicles or to expand the PSO fleet is determined by the NTA taking account of demand.

Noting the NTA’s responsibility in the matter, I have referred the Deputy’s question to the Authority for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

## **Air Services Provision**

180. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there are obligations in terms of regulatory oversight and enforcement in regard to the issue of crew numbers in airlines under the jurisdiction of the IAA. [44090/17]

181. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is satisfied that the dominant employment model of multiple subcontractors for the provision of crew to Irish registered airlines has no hazard or safety implications. [44091/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 180 and 181 together.

The Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) is responsible for aviation safety regulation in Ireland, as provided for under the Irish Aviation Authority Act, 1993.

The Deputy's questions have been referred to the IAA for direct reply. If a reply does not issue within 10 days please contact my Office.

## **Airlines Regulations**

182. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is satisfied with the performance of Irish aviation regulatory authorities in view of the approach taken by the UK Civil Aviation Authority. [44092/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Commission for Aviation Regulation (CAR) is the independent regulator for the enforcement of air passenger rights in Ireland under EU Regulation 261 of 2004. It functions as part of a close network of national enforcement bodies across the EU, including the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) in the UK.

As regards the role played by CAR in enforcing passenger rights in Ireland following the recent announcement by Ryanair of the cancellation of a number flights, I am aware that the CAR has been working directly with the airline since the announcements were made to ensure that the provisions of the Regulation were correctly applied in respect of the passengers affected.

On Friday 29 September, CAR announced that it had secured a commitment from Ryanair that it will fully comply with the regulations and directly provide affected customers with the necessary information on refunds, rerouting, care and assistance and compensation. It is understood that Ryanair has also committed to provide weekly updates to CAR on the number of passengers entitled to compensation and expenses, the number of claims submitted and the number of claims closed-out. I am satisfied with the approach adopted by CAR in dealing with this matter.

It is noted that Ryanair recently replied to correspondence received from the UK Civil Aviation Authority and has agreed to meet its requirements for clarification on Ryanair's obligations under Regulation 261/2004, which are in line with those requested by the CAR.

With regard to the regulation of aviation safety, the Irish Aviation Authority is responsible for safety regulation, oversight and inspection and ensures that all Irish airlines continue to be fully compliant with European aviation safety regulations. In that context, it is important to acknowledge that the IAA is a high performing regulator, whose safety oversight and inspection regime is subject to rigorous international, independent audit, which consistently confirms

it amongst the very best aviation regulatory bodies.

### **Road Projects**

183. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the funding for a project (details supplied) will be allocated; when construction will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44100/17]

**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.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Sports Capital Programme**

184. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he expects to announce the beneficiaries under the sports capital grants scheme for 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44129/17]

**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.

### **Road Projects**

185. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding for the Ardee bypass will be allocated in view of the recent €1.2 billion in extra capital spend, following budget 2018, available to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44131/17]

**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.

We are currently working to finalise detailed allocations with Transport Infrastructure Ireland.

## Light Rail Projects Status

186. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the time-frame for the detailed design work on metro north; his plans for consultation with residents living close to its route; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44231/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), including the new Metro North project.

Funding of over €700 million has been allocated under the Government's Capital Plan for planning, design and to begin construction of new Metro North. Funding in the initial years of the Capital Plan is for planning and design work with construction to commence in 2021 with passenger services starting in 2027.

The NTA and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) have commenced preparatory work on the planning and design of new Metro North and a dedicated project Steering Group has been established which is meeting on a regular basis. The NTA, in collaboration with TII, is undertaking an option analysis and selection study of possible metro alignments and station locations. Arising from this work a final route and station configuration will be established. It is my understanding that the NTA and TII expect that this process will be complete by the end of 2017, after which a public consultation process will be undertaken in 2018.

## Pension Provisions

187. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to concerns regarding the distribution of funds in a scheme (details supplied); if he will request the Pensions Authority to adjudicate on same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44232/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The winding up of Aer Lingus' Supplementary B Pension Scheme is a matter for the company, the scheme's trustees and the members of the scheme. The Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport has no function in relation to the scheme.

## Public Transport Initiatives

188. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the projects and programmes that will be funded in 2018; the cost resulting from the announcement in budget 2018 of the €770 million multi-annual capital envelope supporting the BusConnects programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44289/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I have secured funding of over €400 million for investment in public transport in 2018. This increased funding will allow rollout of a number of key programmes to address congestion and emerging capacity constraints on our public transport system across our cities. This includes:

- Commencing rollout of the BusConnects programme;

- Planning and design work for new urban cycling and walking routes in our main cities. This will pave the way for an intensive construction programme commencing substantially in

2019;

- Additional Luas capacity, with additional trams and longer trams on the Luas network;
- Maintaining the heavy rail network to protect investment already made in our national railway system;
- Progressing the City Centre Re-signalling Project to improve speeds on mainline rail and the new rail Central Traffic Control Centre.
- Continuing the programme of retro-fitting older, existing public transport facilities to improve their accessibility features;
- Traffic management, bus priority and other smarter travel projects in our cities.
- Piloting of emerging low emission technologies, particularly for buses, and also measures to encourage the transition of the national taxi fleet towards alternative fuels and technologies;
- Planning and design work for new Metro North.

Budget 2018 provided a four-year capital envelope for public transport of over €2.7 billion to 2021. As I have previously outlined to the Deputy, this includes a multi-annual capital envelope of over €770 million for the BusConnects programme. This significant funding will enable us to put in place the kind of bus system that is needed to cater for Ireland's future economic growth and growing transport needs, with high quality infrastructure and services, coupled with major improvements in ticketing and information, all providing a modern, faster, reliable, convenient and attractive public transport solution.

### **Youth Work Projects Funding**

189. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the way in which the €1.5 million in additional funding for youth work services announced in budget 2018 will be allocated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44150/17]

**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 €1.5m 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 finalise the 2018 allocations. Every effort will be made to complete this process as soon as possible.

### **Departmental Reports**

190. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 1455 of 26 July 2017, if this report has been published; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44151/17]



**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I announced the Youth Employability Initiative in 2016. 28 youth projects have received grants under this Initiative to support programmes that target disadvantaged young people who are most at risk of unemployment and who are not in education, employment or training. The programmes, which are funded under the Dormant Accounts scheme, assisted over 1,000 young people aged 15 to 24 years build skills that will enhance their employability.

Following a Forum hosted by my Department with the successful projects, sharing knowledge, experience and the lessons learned from this Initiative, three further events were held and were both well attended and received. The Initiative was evaluated by the Centre for Effective Services and a draft report is currently being considered by my Department pending publication in the near future.

### **Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Youth Strategy**

191. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of the LGBTI+ youth strategy; when she expects to receive the final report on the strategy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44152/17]

**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 oversee 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.

### Youth Services Funding

192. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 621 and 625 of 10 October 2017, when a decision will be made in respect of the funding of a programme (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44199/17]

**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. Details of the funding allocated to Scouting Ireland by my Department since its establishment in 2011 are outlined as follows.

Youth Service Grant Scheme	Year	Grant €
	2017	876,337
	2016	834,607
	2015	814,250
	2014	814,250
	2013	845,974
	2012	939,971
	2011	1,005,317

In addition to the above, Scouting Ireland was allocated €150,000 in current funding in 2015 and a further €200,000 in Dormant Accounts funding in 2016 to support the Operation Lelievlet youth employment initiative.

Scouting Ireland also received €49,630 under the capital funding scheme for youth projects and services in 2016 to fund the improvement of disability access and security at Scouting Ireland.

In 2015 €30,000 was also allocated to Scouting Ireland to assist it with its budget sustainability to the year end.

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 a decision on this application will be made as soon as it practicable, and Scouting Ireland will be notified in due course.

## **Dog Breeding Industry**

193. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding dog breeding guidelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44286/17]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The regulation of Dog Breeding Establishments (DBE) is a matter for each local authority in whose functional area the establishment is located. The local authority is required to maintain a register of dog breeding establishments in its functional area, which must include details of applicants for inclusion on the register and the maximum number of breeding bitches that may be kept at the relevant establishment.

The Dog Breeding Establishment Act 2010 provides a robust regulatory framework for, inter alia, the licensing, monitoring and inspection of dog breeding establishments by LAs and, where a serious and immediate threat exists to public health or animal health and welfare, for the closure of such establishments.

The then Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government agreed to begin a process of review of the current Dog Breeding Establishment Guidelines in late 2015. In 2016, the review was broadened to a more formal public consultation, both for quality assurance and to address the need for openness and inclusiveness. A wide-scale formal public consultative process commenced on 1 December 2016 and closed on 28 February 2017.

Responsibility for the Dog Breeding Establishments Act transferred to my Department in July 2017. My Department has completed its review of the feedback and data received through the consultation process and the findings will be submitted shortly to the Minister with delegated responsibility for the matter, Minister of State, Sean Kyne, T.D.

## **Community Banking**

194. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when he will publish the report on public banking; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44102/17]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Programme for a Partnership Government envisaged that An Post, the Irish League of Credit Unions and other interested stakeholders would be asked to investigate and propose a new model of community banking, such as the Kiwibank model in New Zealand, which could be delivered through the post office network. The Programme for Government also includes a commitment to investigate the German Sparkassen model for the development of local public banks that operate within well-defined regions.

My officials have been working actively with the Department of Finance over the last number of months to progress these commitments. In addition, a public consultation process, seeking views on the community banking model, was launched in early March and ran for four weeks. A total of 16 replies were received from a range of stakeholders and all submissions have been reviewed and considered. My officials, along with officials from the Department of Finance, also met with the Sparkassen Foundation for International Co-operation in relation to the German Sparkassen model and obtained detailed information from that organisation.

The Departmental officials are currently finalising a report on the merits of establishing a

local public banking model in Ireland. This work is nearing completion and a report will be submitted to me and to the Minister for Finance shortly. I envisage that the report will be submitted to Government for consideration prior to any decision regarding publication.

### Town and Village Renewal Scheme

195. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the towns and villages in counties Longford and Westmeath that will benefit from the 2017 town and village renewal scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44174/17]

196. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the detail of the allocation of €596,000 allocated to Westmeath County Council under the 2017 town and village renewal scheme; the towns and villages that will benefit from this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44175/17]

197. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the detail of the allocation of €637,400 given to Longford County Council under the 2017 town and village renewal scheme; the towns and villages that will benefit from this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44176/17]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 195 to 197, inclusive, together.

The 2017 Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched on 13th April last, with a focus on improving the economic development of our rural towns and villages. The scheme is funded by my Department and administered through the Local Authorities.

Following the assessment of all proposals received, I recently approved a total of €21.6 million in funding for 281 towns and villages throughout the country under the scheme. A total of 10 towns/villages in Co. Longford and 10 in Co. Westmeath were amongst the successful applicants.

Details of these towns and villages and the funding allocated to each of them under the 2017 Town and Village Renewal Scheme are provided in the following table.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2017

Town or Village	Amount Offered
Longford	
Ballymahon	€58,240.00
Edgeworthstown	€80,000.00
Ardagh	€42,400.00
Granard	€31,200.00
Lanesboro	€30,000.00
Lisryan	€51,200.00
Mullinalaghta	€48,360.00
Newtownforbes	€76,000.00
Newtowncashel	€20,000.00
Longford	€200,000.00
Total Longford	€637,400.00
Westmeath	
Ballinahown	€32,000.00

Town or Village	Amount Offered
Ballinacargy	€40,000.00
Collinstown	€72,000.00
Delvin	€68,000.00
Killucan/Rathwire	€76,000.00
Kinnegad	€33,600.00
Milltown Pass	€84,000.00
Moate	€92,000.00
Rahugh	€38,400.00
Streamstown	€60,000.00
Total Westmeath	€596,000.00

### Child Poverty

198. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which the task of lifting 113,000 children out of consistent poverty can be achieved with budget 2018 only allocating a small increase to the child dependant allowance of €3 per week; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44267/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The increase of €2 in the payment for qualified children (IQC), which most weekly social welfare payments can include, represents an increase of 6.7% in this payment, and will bring the estimated cost of this child-related element of the welfare budget to in the region of €579 million in 2017. This budgetary measure specifically targeted children in low-income families, and as such should assist in the goal of lifting such children out of poverty.

The measure should not be looked at in isolation. It is one of the three main child income support payments available to families, alongside Child Benefit and the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance. This increase brings the combined payment for children to almost €66 per child per week. Altogether, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection will spend in excess of €3 billion in 2017 providing income support for families through Child Benefit, qualified child increases for welfare recipients, Family Income Supplement and the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance.

Social transfers play a crucial role in alleviating poverty and inequality and Ireland is among the best performing countries in the EU for reducing poverty through social transfers. But income supports cannot provide all the solutions. While protecting children and young people from poverty and social exclusion is about ensuring that they have adequate income and resources, it is also about ensuring that they can live in decent houses, have access to good quality education and health-care, and have every opportunity necessary to develop and to participate as equals in society. It is also about helping unemployed families to take-up work and to improve the rewards from work. Government employment policies, such as *Pathways to Work* and the *Action Plan on Jobs*, along with increases in minimum wage and income supports such as the Family Income Supplement and the Back to Work Family Dividend, both of which have been improved in Budget 2018, are clearly working in this regard.

Under the Better Outcomes Brighter Futures framework, a whole of Government approach to tackling child poverty has just been published, which recognises the crucial importance of services such as childcare, housing, and education. It is through this whole of Government approach, which emphasises the need for a combined approach of both income supports and provision of services, that we can find the key to tackling child poverty in Ireland.

### **Back to Work Family Dividend Scheme**

199. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason back to work enterprise allowance is not included as a qualifying scheme for the purpose of awarding back to work family dividend; if she will include the back to work enterprise allowance as a qualifying criterion for the back to work family dividend; if she will address the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44105/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** In order to be eligible for the BTWFD a customer must be aged under 66, must be resident and employed (the employment or self-employment can commence up to four weeks of the claim/scheme ending) in the State, and have been in receipt of an IQC (or equivalent) while in receipt of one of the following payments:

1. Jobseeker's Benefit (JB) or Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) for at least 312 days – of which at least 156 days must have been in the last 12 months.

2. One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) of any duration.

3. Jobseeker's Transition (JST) Payment of any duration.

4. Customers who left jobseekers' or OFP to participate in the following programmes may be eligible if, as part of the programme, they were paid an equivalent to an IQC and they exit the programme to employment or self-employment (i.e. they received a qualified child increase as part of their payment on the scheme/programme); Community Employment, Tús, RSS, Gateway, JobBridge, Work Placement Programme, Education Training Board (ETB) courses including VEC (VTOS) courses or Back to Education Allowance.

In this case, the person concerned was in receipt of back to Work Enterprise Allowance which is not (i) a scheme or programme of employment or work experience, or (ii) a course of education, training or development. As a result, the person concerned did not have an entitlement to Back to Work Family Dividend payment.

At present, there are no plans to revise the eligibility criteria for Back to Work Family Dividend.

I trust that this clarified the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Welfare Appeals Status**

200. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a pension appeal by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44147/17]

**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 28 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.

### Social Insurance Fund

201. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the basis and the way in which debts of approximately €89 million are owed in customer debt to the Social Insurance Fund; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44149/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Social Insurance Fund (SIF) was established by the Social Welfare Act 1952 (as amended). The SIF operates under the terms of the Social Welfare (Consolidation Act) 2005. Under section 9 of that Act the SIF comprises a current account managed by the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and an investment account managed by the Minister for Finance. The income of the SIF derives mainly from the pay-related social insurance collected by the Revenue in respect of employers and employees and self-employer persons. The accounts of the SIF are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Social insurance benefits, redundancy payment entitlement and occupational injury benefits are paid out of the SIF at rates established by the Social Welfare Acts. In the course of the administration of the schemes, overpayments arise which are assessed and become a debt to the Department. Debts arise when benefits are paid in excess of entitlement due to fraud, customer or official error. The Department does not apply interest or penalties on the amounts owing.

The historic outstanding customer debt balance, due in respect of the SIF, at the end of 2016 was €89 million in respect of 48,422 individual debts. This data is set out at scheme level in the following table.

**TABLE: Details of Debt due to the Social Insurance Fund at end 2016 by Scheme**

Scheme	Cases	Outstanding Debt at 31/12/16 €	Average Debt per case €	Share of debt per scheme
Jobseekers Benefit	30,731	23,155,922	754	26.0%
Illness Benefit	8,366	17,398,014	2,080	19.5%
State Pension Contributory	3,418	16,509,186	4,830	18.5%
Widow(er)s Pension Contributory	2,240	8,799,856	3,929	9.9%
Invalidity Pension Contributory	1,401	10,464,351	7,469	11.7%
Maternity Benefit	970	2,150,572	2,217	2.4%
Deserted Wife's Benefit	357	6,498,854	18,204	7.3%
State Pension Transition Contributory	351	1,425,999	4,063	1.6%
Occupational Injuries Benefit	183	126,060	689	0.1%
Carer's Benefit	115	349,504	3,039	0.4%
Disablement Benefit	105	914,842	8,713	1.0%
Guardians Payment Contributory	99	890,922	8,999	1.0%



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Scheme	Cases	Outstanding Debt at 31/12/16 €	Average Debt per case €	Share of debt per scheme
Redundancy Schemes	29	100,431	3,463	0.1%
Partial Capacity Benefit	21	30,733	1,463	0.0%
Health & Safety Benefit	7	3,823	546	0.0%
Adoptive Parent Benefit	5	31,585	6,317	0.0%
Treatment Benefit - Dental Benefit	6	10,371	1,728	0.0%
Widowed Parent Grant Con	4	9,887	2,472	0.0%
Household Benefits (Fund)	4	2,624	656	0.0%
Insolvency Scheme	3	66,617	22,206	0.1%
PRSI Refunds	3	8,932	2,977	0.0%
Death Benefit	2	119,220	59,610	0.1%
Paternity Benefit	1	402	402	0.0%
Medical Care	1	395	395	0.0%
Grand Total	48,422	89,069,102	1,839	100.0%

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Social Welfare Benefits Data

202. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of young persons under 26 years of age who are in receipt of jobseeker's allowance, jobseeker's benefit and signing for credits for 12 months or more; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44157/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The following table provides the number of persons under 26 years of age in receipt of jobseeker's allowance, jobseeker's benefit and credits with a duration greater than 1 year at end of September 2017.

Age	Jobseeker's Allowance	Jobseeker's Benefit	Credits Only
18			
19	906		
20	1,379		3
21	1,439		2
22	1,544	3	5
23	1,578	5	9
24	1,661	5	13
25	2,041	16	15
	10,548	29	47

Lower weekly rates for younger jobseeker's allowance recipients were first introduced in 2009 and extended in subsequent Budgets. These measures were introduced to protect young people from welfare dependency by providing them with a strong financial incentive to engage in education or training or to take up employment. Should a young jobseeker on a reduced jobseeker's allowance payment participate on an education or training programme they will receive a higher weekly payment of €193 which is the maximum personal rate for jobseeker's allowance and this payment will be increased to €198 in March 2018.

I am committed to ensuring my Department continues to identify effective measures to in-

centivise and support young people in finding and securing sustainable jobs. The best way to do this is through engagement processes and by incentivising them to avail of educational and training opportunities, thereby enhancing their employment prospects.

As part of Budget 2018 I announced the introduction of the youth employment support scheme (YESS) which is targeted at young jobseekers who are long-term unemployed or who face barriers to employment. This new work experience programme aims to provide them with the opportunity to learn basic work and social skills in a supportive environment while on a work placement. Participation in the scheme will be completely voluntary, and participants will receive the equivalent of a net minimum wage payment. The details of the new scheme are still being finalised, but I expect to launch it in quarter two of next year.

### **Social Welfare Benefits Data**

203. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of young persons aged 18 to 25 years of age who have applied for a jobseeker's benefit or jobseeker's allowance and were unsuccessful and-or were ineligible for a payment in each of the years 2013 to 2016; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44158/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I regret that this information is not readily available at this time, as the requested statistics are not routinely compiled by my Department.

### **Anti-Poverty Strategy**

204. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the actions she is taking to address the increase in consistent poverty and deprivation among young persons aged 15 to 24 years of age as detailed in the social inclusion monitor report published by her Department (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44160/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The effects of the economic recession were most severe during the period of time from 2009-2012. The number of young people experiencing consistent poverty rose sharply in these years – reflecting increased youth unemployment, and, more significantly, increased unemployment among the parents of young adults who were mainly still studying and living at home. Some improvement was already visible by 2015; the at-risk-of-poverty rate (before social transfers) and the deprivation rate for young people fell in both 2014 and 2015.

Moreover, the effects of the recovery have become increasingly visible since 2015. Unemployment has fallen from 10.2% at the beginning of 2015 to 6.1% in September of this year. The number of people in receipt of working-age income and employment supports has also continued to fall. Given this continuing economic recovery throughout 2016 and 2017 and the measures introduced in Budgets 2016 and 2017, I expect the poverty and deprivation figures for those years, when they become available, to show significant further improvement over the 2015 out-turn.

I also expect further improvement as the economy continues to recover. My Department continues to implement the Pathways to Work 2016 - 2020 Strategy which focuses on ensuring jobseekers, including young people, can access good quality work, training and education

opportunities. It prioritises the activation of the long-term and young unemployed people, with supports provided through the network of Intreo offices. Poverty is strongly linked to unemployment, and as employment increases, we can expect to see decreases in poverty and deprivation.

Recent budgets have been forward looking, allocating limited resources in a prudent way, to make sure that everyone benefits from the recovery. Budget 2018 included an increase of €5 per week for Jobseekers aged under 26 and introduced the Youth Employment Support Scheme which is focused on helping young long-term jobseekers, aged 18 to 24 years, back to work and will be rolled out in 2018. There were also increases in the qualified child rate for children up to the age of 18 years (and up to 22 years for those in school/college) and in the Working Family Payment (formerly known as Family Income Supplement). The Back to Work Family Dividend has also been extended. These will positively impact on the lives of young people, and the households they live in.

The Government's overall strategy for addressing poverty and social exclusion is set out in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. The Plan identifies a wide range of targeted actions and interventions to achieve the overall objective of reducing consistent poverty. My Department is reviewing the Plan this year, as it reaches the end of its current term, with a view to developing an updated plan for future periods. The Department will also review the national social target for poverty reduction. This review will be undertaken in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

The 2015 SILC results show that even now we have a long way to go to achieve the national social target for poverty reduction. I will continue to work with my Government colleagues to ensure that the economic recovery is experienced in all regions and by all families, households and individuals.

### **Zero-hour Contracts**

205. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the actions taken and progress made on each of the 14 recommendations in the Study on the Prevalence of Zero Hour Contracts since the publication of this report, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44161/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I would point out that the Deputy is referring to a report which was commissioned by the previous Government.

In May of this year the Government approved the drafting of legislation to address the commitment in the current Programme for Government to address problems caused by the increased casualisation of work and to strengthen the regulation of precarious work.

The proposed legislation aims to address a number of issues which have been identified as being areas where current employment rights legislation can be strengthened without imposing unnecessarily onerous burdens on employers and businesses. The draft Bill has a particular focus on low-paid, more vulnerable workers. It provides for five key issues:

- Ensuring that employees are better informed about the nature of their employment arrangements and in particular their core terms at an early stage of their employment.
- Strengthening the provisions around minimum payments to low-paid, vulnerable workers who may be called in to work for a period but not provided with that work.

- Prohibiting zero hours contracts in most circumstances.
- Ensuring that workers on low hour contracts who consistently work more hours each week than provided for in their contracts of employment, are entitled to be placed in a band of hours that better reflects the reality of the hours they have worked over an extended period.
- Strengthening the anti-victimisation provisions for employees who try to invoke a right under these proposals.

The draft legislation takes account of the University of Limerick (UL) study on zero hour contracts and low hour contracts and the extensive material and practical examples provided by respondents to the public consultation on the UL study, conducted by the former Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. Furthermore, the draft legislation has also been subject to a detailed dialogue process with ICTU and Ibec over a period of several months.

The Bill is currently being drafted and it is my intention to publish the Bill before the end of the year subject to Government approval.

### **National Minimum Wage**

206. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to abolish the sub-minimum rate of the minimum wage in view of its discriminatory impact on the estimated 10,000 young persons on these reduced rates; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44162/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** In October 2016 the Low Pay Commission submitted its report on the sub-minima rates of the National Minimum Wage Act 2000, which included a study by the ESRI on the usage of sub-minima rates both in Ireland and internationally. The ESRI found that sub-minima rates of a similar nature are in use in a significant number of OECD countries. The Commission concluded that incidence of usage of the sub-minima rates in Ireland is extremely low, with typically less than 0.5% of employees impacted by either the youth or trainee rates. The report also indicated that there is no evidence of significant abuse when it comes to the application of sub-minima rates.

Given that the remit of the Low Pay Commission is to make its recommendations using an evidence-based approach, the Commission had agreed with the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in early 2016 the inclusion, on a pilot basis, of a specific question on the national minimum wage, and the use of sub-minima rates, in the CSO's Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) series. The Commission indicated in its 2016 report that it would await the availability of the up-to-date data on usage of the rates from the CSO before making any recommendation in relation to sub-minima rates.

The QNHS results from the pilot question for 2016 are now available, and I understand that the Low Pay Commission intends to submit its recommendations to me in a supplementary report before the end of the year. The question of whether a change in the current system might be warranted or desirable will be considered further in light of the Commission's recommendations.

### **EU Agreements**

207. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on the proposed Interinstitutional Proclamation on the European Pillar of So-

cial Rights, COM/2017/251 final, that is due to be agreed by the European Parliament, the EU Council and the EU Commission at the Gothenburg Social Summit on 17 November 2017; the issues she has raised during the discussions on this initiative at European level; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [44184/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The proposed Interinstitutional Proclamation (i.e. between the EU Council, Commission and Parliament) on the European Pillar of Social Rights was published by the Commission in April of this year following an extensive Commission consultation throughout 2016 on the EU Pillar of Social Rights.

Ireland has been fully engaged throughout the process, publishing a detailed response to the Commission consultation which was submitted to Government in August 2016 before transmission to the Commission in November 2016. It followed extensive cross-department discussions and engagement with civil society within Ireland.

Ireland has been supportive of the principles of the Interinstitutional Proclamation while seeking, along with other Member States, clarification from the Commission on its legal effects, its impact on national competences and its potential financial implications. The issue will be discussed at the forthcoming EPSCO Council meeting in Luxembourg (employment, social policy, health and consumer affairs (EPSCO)) next week which I will attend. I expect that the next steps will be clearer after that.

### **Nitrates Action Programme Implementation**

208. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position regarding changes to the slurry spreading closed season deadline; if there is now provision for increased flexibility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44096/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The European Union (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations 2014, as amended, give legal effect in Ireland to the Nitrates Directive and to our Nitrates Action Programme (NAP). The Directive requires all member states to define set periods when the land application of fertiliser, including slurry, is not allowed and in Ireland the closed season commenced on 15 October.

The closed periods in Ireland were decided following extensive consultation and were discussed with farming bodies and the European Commission when Ireland's Nitrates Action Programme was introduced. The provisions of the Regulations are underpinned by scientific research and good agricultural practice. The most recent scientific studies carried out on a diverse range of farm and soil types as part of Teagasc's on-going Agricultural Catchments Programme has provided further evidence in support of the efficacy of the current closed periods in reducing nutrient losses to waters. A key message from the research is that there are disproportionately high nutrient losses to waters during the winter and the current closed period coincides with the time during which risks of incidental nutrient losses to water are highest. Farmers are advised to spread slurry early in the season when growth and nutrient uptake are at their peak.

My Department and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine have been closely monitoring the situation and have recognised that there may be some potential concerns for animal welfare arising from heavy rainfall in specific parts of the country (the north west in particular). Farmers with such concerns were advised to contact the Nitrates Section of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine at (053) 9163444 or by email to [nitrates@](mailto:nitrates@)



agriculture.gov.ie with details of the flooding and/or trafficability situation, their herd number and other relevant data. Saturday 14 October was the latest date for such contact to be made.

Farmers wishing to avail of such flexibility are being being advised:

1. To spread only that volume of slurry necessary to ensure adequate storage capacity for the remainder of the closed period
2. That any spreading should occur as soon as good spreading conditions exist
3. That they will be prioritised for inspection by Local Authorities in the immediate future to ensure compliance with the Nitrates Regulations
4. That assessment of overall on-farm storage capacity may be part of that inspection process
5. That the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine will subsequently contact the farmers to ascertain and record the date(s) on which this additional spreading takes place.

Local Authority inspection reports will be returned to my Department and will be shared with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and those farms needing to avail of this flexibility will become a priority category for inspections in future years also.

### **Traveller Accommodation**

209. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the detail of the budget funding of €12 million said to support a range of Traveller specific accommodation schemes and deliver 110 homes in 2018; the way in which, and locations where, these homes will be delivered; the number of these homes that are designated for the Cork area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44128/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** In accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, housing authorities have statutory responsibility for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) in their areas. My Department's role is to ensure that there are adequate structures and supports in place to assist the authorities in providing such accommodation, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding.

The current round of TAPs were adopted in 2014, with the five-year rolling programmes running from 2014 to 2018. These programmes provide a road map for local authority investment priorities over the period. The allocations and recoupment profiles for capital Traveller accommodation projects can vary across local authorities given the local priorities, circumstances and project timelines as set out in the TAPs.

Local authorities submit funding proposals for individual Traveller-specific projects and developments on an annual basis, which are assessed on a case-by-case basis in my Department in advance of allocations being made. In addition, further funding may be considered by my Department throughout the year, also on a case by case basis, in the light of progress across the programme generally. The number of traveller accommodation units to be delivered in all local authority areas, including Cork, will be finalized in the context of the 2018 funding allocations early next year.



## **Brexit Issues**

210. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the implications for the Defence Forces of a hard border post-Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44088/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As part of a whole of Government approach, the Department of Defence is engaged in forward planning for the UK exit from the EU. While the implications for the border will emerge during the course of the negotiations, it is this Government's stated goal to try to ensure that the current on-island border arrangements are maintained to the greatest extent possible. The fact of a UK exit from the EU does not of itself give rise to additional border security requirements at this time.

Primary responsibility for the internal security of the State rests with the Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána. Responsibility for the security aspect of border control rests with An Garda Síochána while the Revenue Commissioners also have responsibilities relating to their particular mandate.

Among the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence is the provision of Aid to the Civil Power which, in practice, means to provide assistance and support to An Garda Síochána when requested to do so. The Defence Forces also provide support to the Revenue Commissioners on request.

The Defence Forces at all times keep operational plans under constant review. There is ongoing close liaison between An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces regarding security matters and regular coordination and liaison meetings take place. I wish to re-assure the Deputy that my Department is monitoring the ongoing situation to ensure that my Department and the Defence Forces are fully prepared to address any potential issues arising in the defence area on foot of Brexit.

## **Departmental Strategy Statements**

211. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence when his Department's statement of strategy 2017 to 2020 will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44171/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Arising from Government changes that occurred on the 14 June last, a draft Strategy Statement for the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces, covering the period 2017 to 2020, must be prepared and submitted to the Minister for Defence no later than the 14 December next.

Work on preparing a draft Strategy Statement is currently underway and, following Ministerial approval, it will be laid before each House of the Oireachtas and published on my Department's website.

## **Defence Forces Reserve Strength**

212. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of new recruits that joined the Reserve Defence Forces, RDF, in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017, in tabular form; when the last non-commissioned officer training course was held in the RDF; when the last officer training course was held in the RDF; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [44172/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The following table sets out the number of new recruits to the Reserve Defence Force in each of the years 2014 to 2016, and to date in 2017.

Year	No. of Inductees
2014	157
2015	344
2016	80
2017	98

I am informed by the military authorities that the Defence Forces Training Management System records indicate that an RDF Potential NCOs course was completed in October 2016. There is an RDF Potential NCOs course ongoing, and it is scheduled for completion in September 2018. The last RDF Potential Officer course was completed in July 2012.

Given the competing recruitment demands at present, where PDF recruitment is and should remain a priority, recruitment to the Reserve is continuing. However, it is not possible at this point to indicate when the Army Reserve (AR) and Naval Service Reserve (NSR) establishment of 4,169 will realistically be achieved and I will keep this under review.

I would like to reassure you that I remain committed to the ongoing development of the RDF within the framework set out in the White Paper on Defence.

### Defence Forces Training

213. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which Defence Forces training continues to be in line with modern and international best practice; if particular procedures are shown to be in need of updating; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44246/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The primary function of training and education in the Defence Forces is to develop and maintain the capabilities necessary to enable it to fulfil the roles laid down by Government.

The Defence Forces conduct training and education under four broad categories namely; leadership, skills, career and collective training. Leadership training is the medium through which the Defence Forces ensure that personnel are prepared for exercising command authority across the full range of military functions both at home and overseas in international operations. Skills training is the medium through which the Defence Forces ensure that its personnel have the requisite individual, specialist, and crew skills. Career training and education provides the organisation with the necessary pool of leaders and commanders at all levels. Collective Training allows military personnel to use their individual, crew, specialist and career training together, to develop integrated and coherent combat forces.

I am advised that the Defence Forces seek to constantly benchmark training across all three arms against best military and academic practice. Military best practice is ensured by implementing a policy of standardisation that is in line with EU and NATO/Partnership for Peace partners. Academic best practice is ensured by benchmarking courses through accreditation under the National Framework of Qualifications which is validated by Quality and Qualifications Ireland.

The Defence Forces deliver military programmes and modules meeting national and international standards. The Defence Forces also engage with external educational institutions in order to facilitate organisational learning. This engagement with national and international educational institutions, military and civilian, aims to ensure that the Defence Forces retain currency with regards to best international practice and employ all relevant modern training methods.

I am committed to ensuring that the personnel of the Defence Forces continue to be trained to best international standards.

### **Overseas Missions Data**

214. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the level of deployment and location of Irish troops overseas on UN or EU related missions; the extent to which further missions are planned or required; the extent to which the need for the upgrading of equipment has been noted arising from such deployment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44247/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** As of 17 October 2017, Ireland is contributing 633 Defence Forces personnel to 10 different missions throughout the world and also to a range of international organisations and National representations. The main overseas mission in which Defence Forces personnel are currently deployed is the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) with 369 personnel and 136 personnel to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in Syria. Also on 06 October 2017, L.É. Niamh with a crew of 57 personnel departed Haulbowline to join the EU naval mission Operation Sophia.

Full details of all personnel currently serving overseas are shown in the tabular statement.

The Department of Defence constantly reviews the deployment of Defence Forces personnel overseas. With regard to any future deployments of Defence Forces personnel overseas, Ireland receives requests, from time to time, in relation to participation in various missions and these are considered on a case-by-case basis.

Defence Forces personnel serving on all overseas missions are equipped with the most modern and effective equipment to carry out their mission. The Defence Forces equipment is upgraded on a continual basis. This equipment enables troops to fulfill the roles assigned to them, as well as providing the required protection specific to the mission.

Members of the Permanent Defence Force Serving Overseas As of 17 October 2017

#### **1. UN MISSIONS**

##### **(i) UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) HQ - 30**

UNIFIL 110th Infantry Battalion - 331

UNIFIL Sector West HQ - 8

##### **(ii) UNTSO (United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation) Israel & Syria - 12**

##### **(iii) MINURSO (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara) - 2**

##### **(iv) MONUSCO (United Nations Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the**

Congo) - 4

(v) UNDOF (United Nations Disengagement Observer Force) HQ (Yafour Damascus) - 1

UNDOF Staff Appointments (Camp Ziouani) - 5

UNDOF 55th Infantry Group (Camp Ziouani) - 130

**TOTAL - 523**

UN MANDATED MISSIONS

(vi) EUFOR (EU-led Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina) - 5

(vii) EUTM Mali (EU-Led Training Mission) - 20

(viii) KFOR (International Security Presence in Kosovo) HQ - 12

(ix) EUNAVFORMED (Op Sophia) L.E. Niamh - 57

**TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONNEL SERVING WITH UN MISSIONS - 617**

**2. ORGANISATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE (OSCE)**

(i) OSCE Mission to Bosnia & Herzegovina - 1

(ii) - Staff Officer, High Level Planning Group, Vienna - 1

**TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONNEL SERVING WITH OSCE - 2**

**3. EU MILITARY STAFF**

Brussels - 4

**4. MILITARY REPRESENTATIVES/ADVISERS/STAFF**

(i) Military Adviser, Permanent Mission to UN, New York - 1

(ii) Military Adviser, Irish Delegation to OSCE, Vienna - 1

(iii) Military Representative to EU (Brussels) - 4

(iv) Liaison Officer of Ireland, NATO/PfP (Brussels) - 2

(v) EU OHQ Operation Althea, Mons, Belgium - 1

(vi) Irish Liaison Officer to SHAPE & Military Co-Op Division, Mons, Belgium - 1

**TOTAL NUMBER OF DEFENCE FORCES PERSONNEL SERVING OVERSEAS  
- 633**

### **Defence Forces Strength**

215. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the strength of the Defence Forces including Reserve, Army, Naval Service and Air Corps; the number of women in each branch of the services; the likelihood of recruitment or replacements following retirements in 2017 and over the next five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44248/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The following table below sets out the information requested by the Deputy as of 30 September 2017.

	Army	Navy	Air Corps	Army Reserve & Naval Service Reserve
Strength (WTE)	7,282	1,075	705	1,916 (effective)
Female Strength (WTE)	486	65	35	279 (effective)

The 2015 White Paper on Defence commits to maintaining the strength of the PDF at 9,500 personnel, comprising of 7,520 Army, 886 Air Corps and 1,094 Naval Service. In that regard, there is significant ongoing recruitment at both enlisted and officer level. A range of recruitment methods are being employed including direct entry competitions for specialist positions and the scope to further expand direct entry is being considered.

There have been two General Service Recruitment Campaigns this year.

A campaign was launched in February 2017 so as to provide a panel of recruits for this year. This campaign resulted in a total of 5,210 applicants (of which 661 were female), broken down as follows:

- Army – 3,785 (479F)
- Naval Service – 1,425 (182F)

A new General Service Recruitment Campaign was launched in September 2017 and closes on the 27 October, 2017. This will provide a panel for recruit inductions in 2018. There have been 2,172 application so far (of which 283 were female), broken down as follows:

- Army – 1,594 (185F)
- Naval Service 2017 – 578 (98F)

So far in 2017, 566 enlisted personnel have been inducted together with 99 Officer Cadets. It is estimated that approximately 800 personnel will be inducted by end 2017.

With regard to the Reserve Defence Force, a General Service Recruitment campaign was conducted between 26 July 2017 and 6 September 2017. There were 1,221 applicants to this campaign of which 162 were female. These applications remain under administration through the recruitment process by the Brigades and Formations.

The manpower requirement of the Defence Forces is monitored on an ongoing basis in accordance with operational requirements of each of the three services. As stated in the 2015 White Paper on Defence, continuous recruitment is the lifeblood of the Defence Forces providing young, motivated and enthusiastic personnel to replenish military formations for operational deployments. Over the course of the White Paper, the Government are committed to retaining a PDF establishment of 9,500 serving personnel. To this end, the Defence Forces will review and develop rolling medium term manpower planning requirements so as to deliver an effective and efficient workforce mix in terms of age profile, skills, competencies and experience, and current personnel policies to support this will be further developed and implemented.

With the support of the Chief of Staff and within the resources available, the Government is committed to retaining the capacity of the Defence Forces to operate effectively across all roles and to undertake the tasks laid down by Government both at home and overseas.

## Anti-Terrorism Measures

216. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which discussions continue to take place at EU level with a view to assuring a high degree preparedness in the event of a terrorist attack; if the Defence Forces continue to be adequately briefed in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44249/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Primary responsibility for security matters and the internal security of the State rests with the Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána. There is significant engagement on an ongoing basis with respect to international terrorism with other countries in the EU.

Among the roles assigned to the Defence Forces in the White Paper on Defence is the provision of Aid to the Civil Power (ATCP) which, in practice, means to provide assistance and support to An Garda Síochána when requested to do so.

There is ongoing and close liaison between An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces regarding security matters, including ATCP deployments and a wide variety of military training activities are specifically designed to counter or respond to possible security emergencies. Regular coordination and liaison meetings also take place between the Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána in relation to ATCP issues.

*Question No. 217 answered with Question No. 49.*

### **Emergency Planning**

218. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the degree to which he remains satisfied with the ability of the Defence Forces to respond to an emergency that might arise; if the quality and extent of the military equipment available remains in line with best international standards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44251/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** My priority as Minister with Special Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capacity of the Defence Forces, including the availability of specialised equipment, is maintained to the greatest extent possible to enable the Defence Forces to carry out their roles both at home and overseas.

In accordance with the Framework for Major Emergency Management, primary responsibility for responding to emergencies caused by severe weather events, such as the storms and flooding, rests with the three designated principal response agencies, namely, the relevant Local Authority, An Garda Síochána, and the Health Service Executive. The Defence Forces provide the fullest possible assistance to the appropriate Lead Department in the event of a natural disaster or emergency situation in its Aid to the Civil Authority (ATCA) role.

At National level, representation on the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning, by both the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces, ensures the fullest coordination and cooperation in the event of an emergency and that the command structure within the Defence Forces is compatible with the requirements in this area.

The full spectrum of Defence Forces personnel and equipment, commensurate with operational requirements, is available for deployments in response to emergency situations. The most important asset that the Defence Forces can provide is personnel, equipped with personal protective equipment, to operate during extreme weather events and with the capacity to support and sustain those personnel if deployed.



I am satisfied that the Defence Forces have the necessary resources available to them, including a modern and effective range of equipment which is in line with best international standards in order to fulfil all roles that are assigned to them by Government. This includes the provision of relevant assistance in response to any emergency situations that may arise.

### **Search and Rescue Service Provision**

219. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which the Air Corps and Naval Service continue to co-operate in air and sea rescue missions; the availability of adequate trained personnel to meet all contingencies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44252/17]

223. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which all military aircraft, fixed wing and helicopters, remain available and in operational order to the Air Corps in the event of emergency and search and rescue operations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44256/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 219 and 223 together.

My priority as Minister with Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service, is maintained to the greatest extent possible so as to enable the Defence Forces to carry out their roles as assigned by Government.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Defence Organisation provides a broad range of services in accordance with its primary security role while it also undertakes a diverse range of non-security-related tasks including supporting the Irish Coast Guard. With particular reference to Search and Rescue, since 2004 the Irish Coast Guard has overall responsibility for the provision of Search and Rescue services within the Irish search and rescue region. Both the Naval Service and the Air Corps continue to provide support to the Irish Coast Guard in maritime Search and Rescue operations on an “as available” basis in line with a Service Level Agreement which sets out their roles and responsibilities in this regard. The Defence Organisation will continue to provide air and sea support, as available, to the Irish Coast Guard in respect of Coast Guard search and rescue operations.

I am satisfied that the resources are available to the Defence Forces, to enable the fulfilment of all roles assigned by Government.

### **Defence Forces Recruitment**

220. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which young unemployed persons have been able to join the Defence Forces; if a specific programme exists in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44253/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** Application to join the Defence Forces is open to all. There is no specific advertising or recruitment aimed at those who are unemployed. The Defence Forces require men and women from all backgrounds that possess a strong sense of duty, enjoy working as part of a team, and are looking for a rewarding yet challenging career.

The White Paper on Defence committed the Government to putting in place a new employment support scheme with the direct involvement of the Defence Forces. Following an evalu-

ation of a pilot programme and Ministerial approval, two iterations of the programme will be conducted in 2017.

The objective of this 10-week scheme is to help develop a path to economic independence for participants, aged between 18 and 24 years, who are at a serious disadvantage owing to their current socio-economic situation. The scheme is designed with the specific aim of equipping participants with life and other marketable and certifiable skills which will assist them both in their capacity to participate fully in society as well as their ability to enter the workforce and or to pursue further education for this purpose.

Participants retain any Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection benefits that they are currently entitled to for the duration of the Scheme. Participation on the scheme is wholly voluntary for the relevant cohort of jobseekers and there is no penalty applied for non-participation or engagement in the programme. Participants do not receive any payment from the Department of Defence.

### **Emergency Planning**

221. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which the Defence Forces can be mobilised in the event of natural disasters including flooding in view of the preferability of early deployment and the need to use specialist equipment in such situations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44254/17]

225. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which the Defence Forces and all others involved in dealing with major natural disasters can be called into action at short notice; if the overall chain of command for dealing with such disasters has been adequately fine tuned to ensure maximum response in the minimum time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44258/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 221 and 225 together.

At National level, representation on the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning, by both the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces, ensures the fullest coordination and cooperation in the event of an emergency and that the command structure within the Defence Forces is compatible with the requirements in this area.

In accordance with the Framework for Major Emergency Management, primary responsibility for responding to emergencies caused by severe weather events, such as storms and flooding, rests with the three designated principal response agencies, namely, the relevant Local Authority, An Garda Síochána, and the Health Service Executive. The Defence Forces provide the fullest possible assistance to the appropriate Lead Department in the event of a natural disaster or emergency situation in its Aid to the Civil Authority role.

Major Emergency Plans have been developed by local and regional authorities and these Plans identify the procedures for requesting assistance from the Defence Forces.

The Defence Forces retains a wide range of specialist skills which can be deployed in such circumstances. The full spectrum of Defence Forces personnel and equipment are available for deployment in response to any emergencies that may arise. The Operations Directorate in Defence Forces Headquarters manages the necessary cross-service coordination in responding to requests for support. These arrangements have proved effective in all emergencies encountered to date.

I am satisfied that the assistance provided by the Defence Forces is provided in a co-ordinated way and that the tried and tested arrangements work well in response to emergencies.

## Defence Forces

222. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the extent to which promotional vacancies remain to be filled in the Army, Naval Service and Air Corps; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [44255/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The Government is committed to maintaining a strength level of 9,500 personnel for the Permanent Defence Force (PDF). This comprises 7,520 Army, 886 Air Corps and 1,094 Naval Service personnel, as stated in the 2015 White Paper on Defence. I am advised by the Military Authorities that the strength of the Permanent Defence Force as of 30 September 2017, the strength of the PDF was 9,062 (Whole Time Equivalent).

The following table outlines the promotional posts vacant within the PDF, by Army, Air Corps and Naval Service as at 31 August 2017, the latest date for which such figures are available.

The manpower requirement of the Defence Forces is monitored on an ongoing basis in accordance with the operational requirements of each of the three services. In this regard, promotions are ongoing within the Officer ranks in order to fill rank vacancies.

The interview stage of a new NCO promotion competition, to fill vacancies to the ranks of Sergeants and above, has taken place over the last few months. Vacancies are currently being filled from this competition.

It is my intention that promotions will continue to be carried out within the resource envelope allocated to Defence.

### PDF vacancies as at 31 August 2017

	Col	Lt Col	Comdt	Captain	SM	BQMS	CS	CQMS	Sgt	Cpl
Army	2	4	-2	35	3	6	31	27	159	91
Air Corps	0	3	2	14	1	0	4	3	27	32
Navy	0	1	-6	28	1	1	9	2	58	52
Total	2	8	-6	77	5	7	44	32	244	175

Note: Equivalent Naval Service Ranks: Lieutenant Colonel/Commander; Commandant/Lieutenant Commander; Captain/Lieutenant (NS); Sergeant Major/Warrant Officer; Battalion Quartermaster Sergeant/Senior Chief Petty Officer; Company Quartermaster Sergeant/Senior Petty Officer; Company Sergeant/Chief Petty Officer; Sergeant/Petty Officer; Corporal/Leading Seaman.

*Question No. 223 answered with Question No. 219.*

*Question No. 224 answered with Question No. 56.*

*Question No. 225 answered with Question No. 221.*