

Written Answers.

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

Questions Nos. 1 to 10, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 11 to 13, inclusive, resubmitted.

Taoiseach's Communications

14. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Taoiseach the details of his recent phone call with the British Prime Minister, Ms Theresa May. [45034/17]

16. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his recent discussions with Prime Minister Theresa May. [45035/17]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 14 and 16 together.

I had phone calls with the UK Prime Minister Theresa May on October 16 and on November 1.

In our conversation on October 16, we discussed the latest developments in Northern Ireland at that time and urged a rapid resumption of talks, with a view to restoration of the Northern Ireland institutions urgently in the interests of the people of Northern Ireland. We also discussed Brexit, including the unique circumstances regarding the border, and preparations for the upcoming meeting of the European Council in Brussels on 19 and 20 October.

In our call on 16 October we also spoke about the damage from storm Ophelia and the Bombardier case.

Prime Minister May and I spoke by phone again on November 1 to review progress made by the political parties in Northern Ireland since our previous phone conversation, including in light of the statement to the House of Commons by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland James Brokenshire the previous day.

We agreed that it is still possible to form an Executive which would be in the interests of all the people of Northern Ireland. I underlined that there could be no return to direct rule as it existed prior to the Good Friday Agreement and that the various provisions of the Agreement would have to be honoured.

The Prime Minister was clear that she did not want to see a return to a direct rule and that moves to implement a Budget for Northern Ireland should not be seen as a first step on the road to direct rule.

We agreed that there is still time to reach an agreement and that the parties should continue

to work to this end, with the support of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney and the Northern Secretary James Brokenshire.

The Prime Minister and I agreed to stay in close contact on the matter over the coming period.

Question No. 15 resubmitted.

Question No. 16 answered with Question No. 14.

Questions Nos. 17 to 21, inclusive, resubmitted.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

22. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his most recent discussions with President Macron of France and his proposals regarding further European integration. [44691/17]

The Taoiseach: My meeting with President Macron in Paris covered bilateral relations, the Brexit negotiations, and the future of Europe.

We noted the extensive trading relationship between us and agreed that this provides a solid platform on which to build into the future, especially as Ireland looks to grow and diversify markets in the context of Brexit.

We also discussed our co-operation in other areas, including the EU Training Mission in Mali, and our joint commitment to the planned Celtic Interconnector that will link our electricity networks.

On Brexit, we welcomed the progress achieved to date in the negotiations and agreed that further work is required on the three withdrawal issues - citizens' rights, financial settlement and Irish/Northern Irish issues - before the European Council can agree that sufficient progress has been made in order to move onto phase two. I thanked the President for his continuing understanding and support on Irish-specific issues.

On other EU issues, we agreed on the importance of supporting agriculture and protecting our vital interests in the ongoing Mercosur negotiations.

We also agreed on the enormous potential of the digital economy. I outlined my view that the best way to achieve a successful outcome in the taxation area is to support the work underway at the OECD.

I acknowledged the renewed energy that President Macron has brought to the debate on the future of Europe, and its further integration, and I outlined my view that we need to focus on where Europe can have concrete and positive impacts on the lives of our citizens.

We also discussed our respective plans to bring the debate on Europe to the public, through the citizens' dialogue, and other mechanisms.

Questions Nos. 23 to 37, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 38 to 47, inclusive, answered orally.

Severe Weather Events

48. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to establish a fodder aid scheme to assist persons in the north west in view of the adverse weather in autumn 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46954/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has been closely monitoring weather conditions, grass growth and feed supplies. It is clear that the weather conditions over the past number of weeks have been challenging and this has created difficulties for farmers in parts of the country, particularly in the Western Regions and on heavier lands.

Grass growth rates through September and October were ahead of recent years. Data from Pasturebase Ireland indicates that production is running about 1 tonne dry matter per hectare ahead of last year. Notwithstanding this, grazing conditions did deteriorate from mid August on farms with heavier land. This has given farmers a number of challenging weeks managing livestock with animals having to be temporarily housed and difficulties with securing later cut silage. I note that there appears to be reasonable supplies of feed and fodder available across the country for those farmers who may require to supplement their own fodder supply. Given these challenges, I have asked Teagasc to work locally in areas with fodder difficulties, supporting the need for good budgeting of fodder supplies on farms for the winter ahead.

The European Commission agreed to my request for an advance payment of the 2017 Basic Payment Scheme, this has been prompted by the protracted inclement weather conditions and also market difficulties caused by currency fluctuations. This means an increase from 50% to 70% in the advance payment rate for the BPS to those applicants whose applications were confirmed fully clear. These payments were recently issued, and balancing payments will be made with effect from early December. There will also be an increase permitted to the advance for Pillar II Rural Development schemes such as GLAS.

These payments and the payments under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme, are injecting up to €800 million into the Irish rural economy and will provide a very welcome boost for Irish farm families.

Taking account of this, there are no plans at this time to establish a fodder aid scheme. My Department will continue to closely monitor the situation.

Fisheries Protection

49. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 169 of 18 October 2017, if previous to 21 September 2017, the company complied with SI 261 of 2008 Notification of Disease (2) (a); the action he has taken or plans to take if the requirements of the legislation were not met. [46928/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Competent Authority responsible for the implementation of the Directive in Ireland is the Marine Institute.

The Marine Institute has confirmed to my Department that the operator of the aquaculture site in question has complied in full with the requirements of the Directive and Statutory Instrument No. 261 of 2008.

The mortalities at the site referred to by the Deputy have been caused in part by Cardiomyopathy Syndrome (CMS) and a jellyfish attack.

While my Department is satisfied that the notification requirements as specified in Statutory Instrument No. 261 of 2008 have been complied with, there are other notification requirements which form part of the terms and conditions of the applicable Aquaculture Licence. My Department is currently examining whether all the necessary notifications required by the licence terms and conditions have been fully adhered to. This examination is currently ongoing as part of a statutory process and, pending completion of this process it would not be appropriate for me to comment further.

Common Agricultural Policy Reform

50. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if in the context of CAP reform the Government sought a reduction in the amounts of the basic payment scheme; if so, the level to which it was requested to be reduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46939/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I want to make it clear that the Government has not sought reduction in the amounts allocated for the Basic Payment Scheme, and that as a matter of National policy, our objective has been to maintain the overall budget for CAP, including the Basic Payment scheme.

In relation to the amount for individual payments, however, since the 16th October 2015, Ireland decided to confine the maximum amount payable to any one applicant under the Basic Payment Scheme (excluding the Greening Payment) to €150,000 per annum.

Regulation 1307/2013, required payments over €150,000 to be reduced (degressivity) and in this context Ireland applied a 100% cut to any payment over that amount. Ireland had actively supported the concept of a maximum level during the current CAP negotiations back in 2013.

While the 2016 Programme for Government, proposed a lowering of the cap on basic payments from €150,000 to €100,000 during a mid term review of the CAP, this opportunity is unlikely to arise as there will be no mid term review of the existing CAP and a lowering of the limit would require a legislative change of the Basic Act 1307/2013 (Direct Payments Regulation) in Council, something that has not been envisaged as part of the Commission ongoing simplification and modernisation programme of the existing CAP. I am however committed to addressing this matter in the context of the future reform of the CAP, with the Commission scheduled to publish a communication on CAP post 2020, on 29 November 2017.

In that context, my Department received a leaked document on 19 October 2017 titled the “The Future of Food and Farming” and it is assumed this is an early draft of the Commission communication scheduled for 29 November 2017. While the extent to which its content will be reflected in the final communication is of course unclear, a notable element included is the suggestion to cap direct payments at between €60,000 and €100,000. My officials are currently examining the impact of such a proposal.

Climate Change Policy

51. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will report on the input his Department had into Cabinet discussions on Ireland’s role in and contribution to global climate change mitigation in advance of the Bonn climate change conference; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47044/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has been actively involved in the whole of Government approach to climate policy and in particular, with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, which is the lead department in this area.

Ireland's contribution to the global climate action plan, The Paris Agreement, is through the intended nationally determined contribution (INDC) tabled by the EU on behalf of its Member States, which commits to a reduction of 40% in EU-wide GHG emissions by 2030, compared with 1990. My Department actively participates in the EU Agriculture, Forests and Other Land Uses (AFOLU) team to promote and seek EU agreement on the Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use approach to the treatment of the land sector in UN climate change negotiations.

The extent of the challenge to reduce GHG emissions is clearly understood by Government as set out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act. Officials from my Department are involved in a number of cross-departmental committees and technical analysis groups established to progress the national climate action agenda.

My Department and its agencies have been strongly focussed on improving the efficiency of Irish farming which is key to reducing emissions. We are focussed on improving animal, grassland and nutrient management and have invested heavily in a number of schemes and measures such as the Origin Green initiative, the Beef Data and Genomics Programme and our Agri-Environment Scheme, GLAS. Our knowledge transfer programmes are key to bringing the latest innovative sustainability research and practices direct to farmers. These strategies have led to a significant disaggregation of production output and emissions, with current analysis suggesting that the emissions intensity per kcal of food output in 2013 is reduced approximately 14% relative to 2005.

Officials from my Department are part of Ireland's National delegation led by DCCAE and have also been engaging with the UNFCCC's Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technical Advice (SBSTA) which is tasked with considering issues related to agriculture. We have engaged in a number of workshops which has seen a lot of good work happening at the technical level.

Development and promotion of locally appropriate technologies and practices based on sound science is crucial to ensure that food production is both resilient to climate change and makes best use of limited resources.

Forestry Management

52. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to establish a special task force to liaise and co-ordinate between his Department and the Departments of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to examine and drive a co-ordinated and coherent plan for utilising and expanding native forestry to maximise its multiple benefits in line with commitments on climate change mitigation, environmental and heritage protection and enhancing biodiversity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47045/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department meets regularly with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and the Department of Culture Heritage and the Gaeltacht on a wide range of forestry issues. There are currently no plans to establish a special task force on native woodlands.

The Native Woodland Establishment Scheme is a key component of Ireland's Forestry Programme, particularly in realising broadleaf targets and in demonstrating how appropriately-

sited and managed forest cover, in the form of native woodlands, can bring a wide range of benefits. My Department is currently carrying out a midterm review of the Forestry Programme 2014 – 2020 in which a number of new initiatives are being considered to boost the planting of native trees. This may include possible improvements to the Native Woodland Conservation scheme. This scheme aims to enhance and protect existing native woodlands.

Furthermore within the context of the Water Framework Directive my Department is promoting its ‘Woodland for Water’ concept involving the development of new native woodlands specifically created to protect and enhance water quality. We are currently working with the Environmental Protection Agency to identify areas where this approach would have the greatest impact.

Forestry Management

53. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether his Department is not sufficiently supporting small scale coppice management of existing hedgerows and woodlands on farms (details supplied); his plans to use existing funding not currently being availed of for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47041/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Coppice management is a traditional form of woodland management in Ireland, dating back centuries, and is associated with high native woodland biodiversity and the production of material suitable for local consumption, for example firewood, craftwork and cottage industry end-uses. Unfortunately, the vast majority of these woodlands have been neglected or exploited in the last century or two, and have lapsed as functioning coppice woodland to form high forest canopy.

My Department’s Native Woodland Conservation Scheme supports the protection and enhancement of existing native woodlands. The restoration of these former coppice or coppice-with-standards woodland to active coppice management is an eligible operation under this scheme. To date, every valid application under this scheme has been approved.

My Department also supports the growing of timber for wood fuel under the Forestry for Fibre grant and premium category. Forestry for Fibre provides financial assistance to landowners who want to plant trees for use as domestic fuel or as an energy source generating heat and/or electricity. Trees planted under Forestry for Fibre can be harvested in 10 – 15 years, generating yields of between 150 – 300 cubic metres per hectare. This rotation is significantly less than conventional forestry where conifer forests mature between 35 and 40 years.

My Department continues to support the planting of new native forests under the afforestation scheme. Under this scheme the entire cost of establishment is covered by the grants available. Furthermore, the highest level of premiums are paid for native woodland establishment where annual premiums of €635 per hectare is available to landowners for 15 years. Further improvements to this grant and premium category have been proposed under the midterm review in order to further encourage landowners to plant native woodlands.

Beef Industry

54. Deputy Martin Kenny asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to block the Mercosur deal as it currently stands to protect Irish farm livelihoods; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46942/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I and my officials have been very active in highlighting the potentially very damaging impact of a Mercosur deal on the European agriculture sector, and on the beef sector in particular. We continue to monitor the situation closely and respond as appropriate to developments in order to defend the interests of Irish farmers, working in close co-operation with my Government colleagues, particularly the Tánaiste and the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, and the Taoiseach.

At political level, I have continuously raised the issue with my Member State colleagues and with Commissioners Hogan and Malmström, both within the Council of Agriculture Ministers and in written form. These efforts have been reinforced at official level through similar contacts with Member States and the Commission, particularly through the Special Committee on Agriculture and the Trade Policy Committee. The Taoiseach has also raised the matter with Presidents Junker and Macron.

Most recently Ireland made the latest in a series of very strong interventions on this matter at the Trade Policy Committee in Brussels on 27 October, and I raised the matter at the Council of Agriculture Ministers in Luxembourg in October and again in Brussels this week. I have also worked very closely with a number of other Member States, most notably France, including in the production of a joint paper that was submitted to the European Commission on 26 September outlining our shared concerns. And I wrote to Commissioner Malmström in early October reiterating my concerns in relation to the tabling of a beef tariff rate quota offer by the EU during the most recent round of negotiations.

I believe there is a need for continued vigilance in relation to the conduct of these trade negotiations, and I will continue to insist that they are handled appropriately, and in a manner that safeguards the interests of the Irish and European beef sector. In this regard I believe full account must be taken of the findings of the Commission's own assessment of the cumulative impact of trade deals on the agrifood sector, and the potentially very damaging impact of Brexit on an already delicately balanced EU beef market.

Against this background I can assure the Deputy that I will continue to engage closely with other Member States and the Commission to ensure that the interests of the EU beef sector are protected in any trade deal with Mercosur countries.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Funding

55. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there will be a public consultation in the allocation of the additional funding for the ANC scheme in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46931/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) Scheme is a very important source of financial support for farmers across the country, paying over €200 million each year to over 95,000 farmers. In view of this, the Programme for a Partnership Government included a commitment for a €25 million increase in funding for the Scheme in 2018. I am happy to confirm that this commitment was delivered in the recent budget.

There are a number of options in relation to how this additional €25 million can be allocated in 2018. These options are currently being examined, with a view to being in place for payment under the 2018 Scheme. As part of this process, I have had some discussions with farm bodies in relation to their views on the allocation of this additional funding, and this process will con-

tinue as the increased funding is allocated to the 2018 scheme. Changes to payments under the scheme will also require formal agreement with the EU Commission via a formal amendment of the Rural Development Programme, 2014-2020.

The 2017 ANC payments commenced on 19th September and to date over €187 million has been paid to some 87,000 farmers. Payments are continuing on a rolling basis as more farmers satisfy eligibility and stocking rate requirements.

I am pleased to note that 2017 payments are ahead of where they were this time last year.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

56. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department has made or will make revisions to its policies in regard to the management of methane emissions from enteric fermentation and manure management in view of a recent study (details supplied) in which revised calculations of methane produced per head of cattle show that global livestock emissions in 2011 were 11% higher than estimates based on data from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47094/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am aware of the report the deputy is referring to, however, I note that the report states that regarding livestock methane emissions there is notable variability among regions and sources. The Report found that total livestock methane emissions have increased the most in rapidly developing regions of Asia, Latin America and Africa. In contrast, emissions decreased slightly in Western Europe.

In Ireland, methane accounts for approximately 22% of our national GHG emissions and is based on nationally appropriate emissions factors and robust national animal census figures.

As the deputy will be aware, there is a whole of Government approach to climate policy as set out in the National Climate Policy Position. Officials from my Department work very closely with other Departments and in particular, with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, which is the lead department in this area.

The long-term ambition for the Irish agriculture and land use sector is an approach to carbon neutrality which does not compromise capacity for sustainable food production. The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 provides a statutory basis for Government policy on climate change. As required by the Act, a National Mitigation Plan (NMP) was published in July and includes key sectoral mitigation measures for the agriculture, forest and land use sector.

Irish agricultural production is recognised by international independent analysis as having one of the lowest carbon-footprints within the EU.

The European Commission's Joint Research Centre Report of 2010 also recognised with regards to dairy systems in Europe, intensive systems create less methane and nitrous oxide emissions than extensive ones, but this is countered by higher emissions from land use and land use change. Lowest emissions are created by extensive grassland systems, such as those in Ireland. The FAO has also recognised the efficiency of our temperate grassland based production system.

A range of actions are being undertaken to make Irish farming even more environmentally

sustainable, including measures under the Rural Development Programme (RDP), which is worth almost €4 billion over 7 years. The Programme is strongly targeted towards environmental benefits, including knowledge transfer programmes, which will bring the latest innovative sustainability research and practices direct to farmers.

My Department continues to invest in and engage with research initiatives to further assist with the refinement, development and deployment of new and innovative practices to reduce GHGs that are associated with agricultural production. Future policy interventions will be based on the outcome of such well-informed scientific research.

Brexit Issues

57. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures he proposes to limit the impact of Brexit on farmers in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46937/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I fully recognise the potential difficulties that farmers, including those in County Wexford, are likely to face in the event of a hard Brexit, given the highly integrated nature of agri-trade between Ireland and the UK.

From the beginning of the Article 50 negotiations Government policy has been to maintain a trading relationship with the UK as close as possible to the current configuration, and in the case of the Island of Ireland, to avoid any kind of border.

The position of Government on this matter could not be clearer. As a response to Ireland's concerns, the special position of Ireland is explicitly recognised in the Article 50 negotiating guidelines, which indicate that flexible and imaginative solutions will be required to avoid a hard border.

This is also the position articulated in Prime Minister May's letter triggering Article 50 on 29th March 2017, and equally is reflected in the position adopted by the European Parliament. The need to protect the Good Friday Agreement and the Common Travel Area is a critical part of this dynamic. All of the institutions of the European Union and the UK Government are ad idem on these principles, and I believe that there is a broad political consensus in this House also. Clearly the best protection for farmers in Co. Wexford and elsewhere, lies in the avoidance of a hard border.

Ever since the UK Referendum on Brexit, I and my Department have been actively engaged in assessing the impact of the vote on the Irish agrifood sector, consulting with appropriate stakeholders and engaging with the relevant politicians and institutions. This work is being done in conjunction with the overall Government response led by the Department of Foreign Affairs.

While the main impact to date of the Brexit vote has been the effect of sterling volatility on those businesses that have a significant trading relationship with the UK, the medium to long term threats include the possible introduction of tariffs on trade between the EU and UK, potential divergences in regulations and standards between the EU and UK, and the implications of border controls and certification requirements.

I and my Department, in cooperation with Government and other Departments and Agencies, are attempting to mitigate the consequences through a range of activities under two distinctive pillars – Competitiveness and Product/Market Diversification.

Under Competitiveness my Department introduced a number of measures in Budget 2017 to help minimise farm gate and business costs, including the introduction of €150m low cost loan scheme for primary producers, new agri-taxation measures and increased funding under the Rural Development and Seafood Development Programmes. Under Budget 2018, I have provided exchequer funding to support a €300m Brexit loan scheme, at least 40% of which will be available to food businesses, and my Department is working with SBCI to develop a similar scheme for farmers, Fishermen and food business.

Under Product/Market Diversification I continue to support Bord Bia in its investment in market prioritisation initiatives, which are aimed at identifying potential diversification opportunities. Since the final quarter of 2016 I have provided Bord Bia with more than €14 million in additional funding for a programme of marketing and promotional activity in international and EU markets, and also in the UK.

I have also allocated an additional €2m to Teagasc to allow them to commence work on an €8.8m investment in a new National Food Innovation Hub which will help Irish food businesses to innovate and expand.

I wish to assure the House that I and the Government remain very focused on supporting the agrifood industry through the challenges ahead. I will continue to consult with the industry as the negotiations develop, and press Ireland's case for continued free access to the UK market, without tariffs and or burdensome customs and administrative procedures.

Food Exports

58. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent of exploration to date of alternative markets for Irish food and food products throughout the EU and globally with particular regard to the need to make alternative arrangements with the onset of Brexit; the extent to which it seems likely to bridge the gap arising from the UK exit from the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47093/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The identification of alternative markets for Irish food and food products within the EU and elsewhere has been a key priority for me and my Department and we have renewed our efforts in this regard against the background of Brexit.

The task requires a focused effort on attracting new economically viable markets and, while our record to date has been very impressive, we have to raise the bar even further. We are, however, fortunate in that we have an excellent industry-led strategy for the growth of the sector in Food Wise 2025 which provides a clear road-map for its development.

Last April I set out a seven point plan which was aimed at increasing international market access for Irish food and drink exports. The plan is being implemented by my Department, with significant input from Bord Bia and Irish Embassies around the world, in order to help increase the footprint of our food and drink exports.

Ireland has been proactive in addressing market access issues, so that markets are open when demand factors align in our favour. For example, in 2017 Ireland hosted inspection visits from Chinese, US and South Korean authorities. There have also been a number of notable market access successes in recent years:

- Ireland was the first EU country to gain access to the US market for beef in 2014;

- Ireland has agreed a beef protocol with China and is working through the final stages of access with Chinese authorities;

- For meat sectors in 2017 alone, access has been granted or trade conditions simplified in Egypt, Namibia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Singapore, Israel, and Chile.

The Department is continuing to work with competent authorities in many other third countries on beef, sheepmeat, pigmeat, seafood and poultry access issues.

Later this week I will lead a Trade Mission to South East Asia, this time to Japan and the Republic of Korea where I hope to deepen trade ties and develop new market opportunities. This follows on from earlier trade missions to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in Feb/March, and to the USA and Mexico last June. In addition, over the past two years I have led trade missions to China, Singapore, the Gulf States and Morocco, Minister of State Doyle has led missions to Vietnam and South Korea, and departmental officials have led missions to Iran, Algeria and Turkey.

The UK will continue to be a vital market outlet for our industry, and with that in mind, I have met with the CEOs of the major UK retailers to impress upon them Ireland's continued commitment to meeting the requirements of UK retailers and consumers.

I am keenly aware of the need to ensure that adequate market opportunities continue to exist for our agrifood products after the UK exit the EU and I wish to assure the House that I, my Department and our Agencies will continue to do everything necessary to ensure that this is so.

Animal Welfare

59. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the input his Department will have into the European Court of Auditors audit on animal welfare measures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46932/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The European Court of Auditors (ECA) mission is to contribute to improving the European Union's (EU) financial management, promote accountability and transparency and act as the independent guardian of the financial interests of the citizens of the Union. The ECA's role as the EU's independent external auditor is to check that EU funds are correctly accounted for, are raised and spent in accordance with the relevant rules and regulations and have achieved value for money.

As an independent auditor, the ECA must remain separate from the influence of any Member State. It selects specific tasks at its own discretion and formulates its audit plan on the basis of criteria such as public interest, risk of irregularity or poor performance and potential for improvement. The ECA has recently made the decision to examine whether Member States have made effective contributions to the European Union's animal welfare objectives and whether compliance has been achieved with animal welfare legislation.

It is proposed that five countries - Germany, France, Romania, Italy and Poland - be assessed in this current programme, with audit reports from the ECA expected to issue in late 2018. These inspections will focus specifically on policies relating to farm animals, with scrutiny to be applied not only to on-farm conditions but also to other important components of the industry such as transport and slaughter.

The European Union has always ensured that animal welfare issues are assigned the highest priority. It has reinforced policy objectives with significant Rural Development contributions

under the Common Agricultural Policy, which will contribute €1.5 billion to animal welfare payments from 2014 to 2020. This proposed ECA audit plan is an important development and displays both to worldwide markets and to our own citizens, that animal welfare is a cornerstone of the EU Agriculture model.

While Ireland has not been selected for an audit on this occasion, officials of my Department are ready to facilitate, and engage with, members of any ECA audit team which may be assigned to this jurisdiction at a future date.

Animal Identification Schemes

60. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the rules for the movement of animals to bed and breakfast accommodation; the protections in place for the owner of the animals if the new rules allow that the next movement of the animals is not automatically back to the original herd; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46953/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The bovine traceability system is operated in accordance with EU regulatory requirements whereby movements from holding to holding are recorded.

A bed and breakfast arrangement is where one farmer contracts another farmer to care for his animals on their farm e.g. overwintering the cattle.

The rules for all movements, including those that occur during bed and breakfast arrangements, are the same. Cattle can return to the source herd or be moved to another holding or to slaughter provided such movement satisfies the movement rules on the Animal Identification and Movement database (AIM).

From a bovine traceability perspective animals must be recorded properly in the location that they currently reside on the AIM database. It should be noted that my Department has no role in relation to the ownership of animals or any legal contract associated with the animals during a bed and breakfast arrangement. Such issues are commercial matters between the herd keeper and the operator of the bed and breakfast outlet.

In the Information Note for Applicants for a Herd Number for Cattle it clearly states that ownership of animals is not inferred by the granting of a herd number or the role of herd keeper.

Forestry Sector

61. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to support wholesale tree nurseries that experienced damage from Storm Ophelia; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46394/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am very aware of the damaging effects of Storm Ophelia on many sectors, including agriculture and horticulture. This is most regrettable as the horticulture sector is experiencing strong market demand after a number of challenging years. I am confident that as our economy continues to grow the nursery sector will likewise prosper.

In 2016, Ireland's horticulture sector contributed over €430m to the value of output at farm-gate level. The horticulture sector is estimated to be directly responsible for over 6,600 jobs with many more employed indirectly both upstream and downstream. Within the total horticul-

ture farm gate output value of €430m the hardy nursery stock sector and the protected amenity plant sector combined to contribute almost €51m in 2016 to the value of output at farm-gate level. This value was up from an estimated €44m in 2015.

While market prospects for amenity plant growers are certainly very positive, I am very conscious of the challenges, not least from the recent storms, currently facing the industry and my Department, along with the various state agencies; Bord Bia, Teagasc and Enterprise Ireland, are working closely to support the industry through a number of measures.

The Scheme of Investment Aid for the Development of the Commercial Horticulture Sector is the main support offered by my Department to the amenity or nursery sector. This scheme facilitates capital investments in a broad range of specialised horticultural equipment and buildings by providing grant aid on approved costs at a rate of 40%. In the case of young applicants under 35 years of age the rate of grant aid increases to 50%.

This scheme is highly regarded by the industry and is an excellent vehicle for investment in all sectors of the Horticulture industry. I sought an increase in the Budget allocation for the scheme in 2017 and this increase has been maintained through the allocation of €5m for the Scheme in 2018. In light of the sectoral demand, I am working to advance the launch of the 2018 Commercial Horticulture Scheme. A timely launch of the 2018 Scheme is recognition of the most recent challenge to the sector but is also a clear signal of my continued support for, and commitment to its ongoing development.

Under the scheme, €6.4 million in grant aid has been paid to applicants from the Nursery Stock and related Amenity Plant Sectors over the period 2008-2016. This has supported investment of almost €16 million by the sector. In the current year a further €1.1 million in grant aid has been allocated under the scheme to 29 applicants from the Nursery Stock and related Amenity Plant Sectors.

This year, approvals under the scheme were issued to an overall total of 156 applicants across the horticulture industry. Many of the 2017 scheme applicants have already been inspected and paid. The processing of more recent claims is on-going and every effort is being made to deliver payments as quickly as possible to assist growers that may be facing cash flow issues. For 2017 the Commercial Horticulture Grants Scheme was allocated a budget of €5m and my staff advise me that they expect the full budget available for the scheme this year will be utilised.

Maintaining the increased allocation of €5m in funding for the 2018 Scheme of Investment Aid for Commercial Horticulture reflects this Government's commitment to ongoing support for Ireland's horticulture sector. The competitive nature of the Commercial Horticulture Grants Scheme combined with the scheme's flexibility and ability to react to evolving situations are two key strengths in supporting this highly dynamic sector.

Growers, including amenity plant nurseries that wish to apply for the scheme are encouraged to prepare and submit their applications as soon as possible.

In terms of other supports for the sector I would also like to add that the "SBCI Loan Scheme" launched in last year's budget was a great success and a number of horticultural businesses have benefitted from these low interest loans. As part of the recent Budget, €25 million has been secured to facilitate the development of a new Brexit response loan scheme for farmers, fishermen, and food businesses in 2018 and further details about that scheme will be announced in due course.

Nitrates Usage

62. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding attempts by the Government at EU level to ensure the reauthorising of glyphosate for Irish farmers. [47097/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The European Commission extended the approval of glyphosate for a limited interim period in June 2016 to allow for the completion of an assessment by the Committee for Risk Assessment (RAC) of the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA). The extension followed a comprehensive review by the European Food Safety Authority. This review, which included detailed consideration of a report produced by the International Agency for Research on Cancer of the World Health Organisation, concluded that glyphosate is unlikely to pose a carcinogenic hazard to humans and can be used safely without putting consumers or users at risk.

The Risk Assessment Committee concluded in March 2017, in an opinion adopted with the full support of all members, that glyphosate does not warrant classification as carcinogenic, mutagenic or toxic for reproduction. This means that legally glyphosate does not meet any of the substance non-approval criteria specified in Regulation 1107/2009. A final decision on renewing the approval of glyphosate is due to be taken by 15 December 2017.

Based on the conclusions of the risk and hazard assessments conducted by the European Food Safety Authority and the European Chemicals Agency the Commission prepared a first draft of a proposal for renewal of the approval of glyphosate for a 10-year period with various conditions of use attached, instead of the normal 15-year approval period. The proposal was discussed by Member State representatives at the technical experts standing committee meeting in July 2017 and again in early October.

My Department indicated support for the Commission proposal for a 10 year approval period tabled at these meetings. However, as there was insufficient support for the Commission proposal, no formal vote was taken. There followed a brief discussion which largely concentrated on the length of the approval period, but this discussion failed to yield a satisfactory compromise.

A further meeting of the standing committee is scheduled for tomorrow 9 November to consider a revised proposal to renew the approval of glyphosate for a 5 year period.

In my view it is important that decisions such as this are made on the basis of the best scientific information that is available to us as policy makers. In this instance the latest scientific information available from assessments completed by the European Food Safety Authority and the European Chemicals Agency supports the renewal of glyphosate and my Department has therefore supported Commission proposals in this regard.

Nitrates Usage

63. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding a product (details supplied) further to the decision by the European Parliament to back a full ban on glyphosate-based herbicides; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46936/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): At the end of October the European Parliament approved a resolution, which is non-binding, against renew-

ing the approval of glyphosate for 10 years and calling for further restrictions on the substance from 2018 and an outright ban in 2022. This resolution does not impact on existing authorisations of products that contain glyphosate.

The process that has been followed to date with regard to the renewal of the approval of glyphosate involved the European Commission extending the approval of glyphosate for a limited interim period in June 2016 to allow for the completion of an assessment by the Committee for Risk Assessment (RAC) of the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA). The extension followed a comprehensive review by the European Food Safety Authority. This review, which included detailed consideration of a report produced by the International Agency for Research on Cancer of the World Health Organisation, concluded that glyphosate is unlikely to pose a carcinogenic hazard to humans and can be used safely without putting consumers or users at risk.

The Risk Assessment Committee concluded in March 2017, in an opinion adopted with the full support of all members, that glyphosate does not warrant classification as carcinogenic, mutagenic or toxic for reproduction. This means that legally glyphosate does not meet any of the substance non-approval criteria specified in Regulation 1107/2009. A final decision on renewing the approval of glyphosate is due to be taken by 15 December 2017.

Based on the conclusions of the risk and hazard assessments conducted by the European Food Safety Authority and the European Chemicals Agency the Commission prepared a first draft of a proposal for renewal of the approval of glyphosate for a 10-year period with various conditions of use attached, instead of the normal 15-year approval period. The proposal was discussed by Member State representatives at the technical experts standing committee meeting in July 2017 and again at two meetings in October.

A further meeting of the technical experts standing committee is scheduled for tomorrow, 9 November to consider a revised proposal to renew the approval of glyphosate for a 5 year period.

The continued authorisation of products containing glyphosate for use in Ireland after 2017 is dependent on the outcome of the current EU decision-making process. In my view it is important that decisions such as this are based on the best scientific information that is available to us as policy makers. In this instance the latest scientific information available from assessments completed by the European Food Safety Authority and the European Chemicals Agency supports the continued approval of glyphosate.

Ministerial Meetings

64. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the discussions he has had with the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government regarding exceptional cases being examined for slurry spreading; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46934/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG) is the lead Department in relation to the nitrates regulations. The closed period for slurry spreading as provided for in the regulations commenced on 15 October. Taking account of the high rainfall in the lead up to the commencement of the closed period, the DHPLG and my Department recognised that there may be some concerns for animal welfare. Farmers with such concerns were advised to contact the Nitrates Section of my Department by 14 October. Farmers wishing to avail of flexibility for

spreading slurry were advised:

- To spread only that volume of slurry necessary to ensure adequate storage capacity for the remainder of the closed period.
- That any spreading should occur as soon as good spreading conditions exist.
- That the Nitrates Section of my Department will subsequently contact the farmers to confirm the dates on which this additional spreading takes place.

Approximately 600 farmers out of a total of 109,000 bovine farmers in the State contacted my Department to indicate they may not be able to complete the spreading of slurry by the beginning of the closed period. We are in the process of confirming how many of these 600 farmers have had to avail of this limited flexibility. These farmers will be prioritised for inspection by Local Authorities to ensure that minimum storage requirements are in place.

We are currently negotiating the next Nitrates Action Programme and Nitrates Derogation and it is critical that these negotiations progress and we avoid the difficulties encountered in other Member states such as Holland. In this context and to ensure the protection of water quality, this course of action is deemed necessary; those farmers with the required storage capacity availing of this flexibility should not have reason for concern.

As regards farm safety and slurry, both Departments stress the importance of farmers ensuring that safety is their number one priority as toxic gases are released when slurry is agitated and one breath at this time can cause instant death. All of those working with slurry should be aware of the dangers involved and make sure they work safely at all times.

Noxious Weeds Act Enforcement

65. Deputy Martin Heydon asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the work of his Department in implementing the law on noxious weeds, including ragwort, on both public and private land; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47091/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department actively seeks to enforce the provisions of the 1936 Noxious Weeds Act by issuing “Notices to Destroy” in all instances where it becomes aware of the presence of noxious weeds.

To date this year 21 such notices have been issued. This reflects a comparable level to that reported in 2016. These notices are issued as a result of inspections carried out by Department Field Officers or on receipt of reports made by the public. Follow-up action may be undertaken by

Departmental officials with the land owner to ensure that the notifications are acted upon and that the particular weeds have been dealt with as stipulated in the Notice to Destroy.

My Department seeks to engage with all County Councils, Local Authorities and the National Roads Authority to ensure a consistent programme of treatment and disposal of such weeds on an ongoing basis. In this regard, my Department was in contact with each of the County and Local Authorities in the Country earlier this year emphasising their statutory obligation and the importance of implementing measures for the treatment and safe disposal of ragwort in order to eliminate and prevent the spread of same.

On the issue of any impact of an infestation of ragwort on farmers’ area-based schemes payments, farmers are obliged to keep their lands free from noxious weeds under the cross-com-

pliance measures set down for farming practices. Failure to do so can result in the application of a reduction of their payment entitlement. EU Regulations governing the various area-based Direct Payments Schemes, e.g. Basic Payment Scheme, Greening, and Rural Development measures, call for applicants to comply with Cross- Compliance requirements relating to the 13 Statutory Management Requirements (SMR's) and the 7 Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) standards. GAEC Standard 7 requires applicants to ensure that they take appropriate measures to prevent the encroachment/proliferation of noxious weeds/invasive plant species onto land. While 2017 statistics are not currently available, during 2016, a total of 89 sanctions were undertaken which resulted in the application of 65 such penalties.

While the Noxious Weeds Act makes provision for taking prosecutions against offenders, this measure has not been resorted to in recent years. Modern farming has reached a level of specialisation and intensification which makes weed control a fundamental and automatic practice. However, the prevalence of ragwort found along the margins of roadways and in locations such as derelict sites regrettably appears to have increased.

Forestry Management

66. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason there has not been a specific move to target the 500,000 acres of non-commercially viable Coillte lands identified by the McCarthy report in 2010 for the development of mixed native woodlands (details supplied) in view of the problem of land availability for forestry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47042/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Coillte was established as a private commercial company under the Forestry Act, 1988 and day-to-day operational matters, such as the management of its lands, are the responsibility of the company.

The matter was, however, raised with Coillte who advise that it has a systematic and detailed inventory of all of the lands under its management which equates to approximately 440,000 hectares, or over one million acres, of land. Coillte's core business is forestry and its ambition is to maximise the value of every hectare of land under the company's stewardship. Coillte also advised that, of Coillte's overall total land bank, approximately 120,000 hectares are classified by Coillte's inventory as being other than commercial forests and that these lands consists of broadleaved forests, mixed forest, inaccessible areas, bare/swamp and open ground.

Coillte also confirmed that the majority of these 120,000 hectares is represented by relatively small blocks inter-mingled with commercial forest areas, with a significant portion of these lands classified by Coillte as biodiversity areas in line with the requirements of Coillte's forest certification schemes, namely FSC and PEFC, and sustainable forest management practices. These biodiversity areas carry specific ecological management plans which may require the lands to remain unplanted to promote specific conservation values on site.

Coillte further confirmed that it is constantly and actively looking at its land resource and will plant trees where it is silviculturally appropriate and environmentally beneficial to do so.

Fodder Crisis

67. Deputy Charlie McConalogue asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether there is a looming fodder shortage in the west and north west of the country; the steps his Department is taking to assess the extent of the shortage; his plans to

introduce financial aid for persons that are most affected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47100/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has been closely monitoring the situation. Weather conditions over the past number of weeks were challenging for farmers and this has created difficulties for farmers in the Western and North Western regions.

It would appear that there was abundant grass growth through the autumn time. Data from Pasturebase Ireland indicates that production is running about 1 tonne dry matter per hectare ahead of last year. However for those farming on heavier land grazing conditions deteriorated from mid August. This created difficulties for these farmers in terms of hampering late cut silage making operations and also resulting in cattle being housed earlier than normal in places.

Currently it appears that there are reasonable supplies of feed and fodder available across the country for those farmers who may require to supplement their own fodder supply. However, I have asked Teagasc to work locally in areas with fodder difficulties, to support good budgeting of fodder supplies on farms for the winter ahead.

The European Commission agreed to my request for an advance payment of the 2017 Basic Payment Scheme. This has been prompted by the protracted inclement weather conditions and also market difficulties caused by currency fluctuations. This means an increase from 50% to 70% in the rate for the BPS to those applicants whose applications were confirmed fully clear. These payments were recently issued, and balancing payments will be made with effect from 1 December. There will also be an increase permitted to the advance for Pillar II Rural Development schemes.

These payments and the payments under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme, are injecting up to €800 million into the Irish rural economy and will provide a very welcome boost for Irish farm families.

Taking account of this, there are no plans at this time to establish a fodder aid scheme. My Department will continue to closely monitor the situation.

TAMS Expenditure

68. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the amount of unspent funding in TAMS indicates scope for the inclusion of standby generators for dairy farmers affected by power outages. [46940/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The TAMS II Scheme has been very successful to date in terms of uptake with the number of approvals that have issued to date exceeding 11,500. All of these approvals represent committed expenditure under the TAMS II measure of the Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020. Until such time as these approvals are acted upon or expire the budget for TAMS must include provision for the potential expenditure involved.

Of the applications approved just under 2,500 payment claims have been received to date, representing 21% of approvals. Payment claims submitted have been paid in over 75% of cases and these continue to be paid on an on-going basis. However, until such time as the works applied for and approved have been completed and payment claims submitted, payments cannot issue. All participants who have completed approved works are urged to submit their payment claims immediately to facilitate early payment.

Approvals and payments continue to issue on an on-going basis for the comprehensive list of investments already included in the suite of seven existing TAMS measures. Change-over switches or generators are not part of the TAMS II schemes at present and there are currently no plans to include them.

Animal Welfare

69. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will write to the European Court of Auditors and request it to extend its upcoming audit on animal welfare measures to include companion animals also; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46933/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The European Court of Auditors' (ECA) mission is to contribute to improving EU financial management, promote accountability and transparency, and act as the independent guardian of the financial interests of the citizens of the Union. The ECA's role as the EU's independent external auditor is to check that EU funds are correctly accounted for, are raised and spent in accordance with the relevant rules and regulations and have achieved value for money.

As an independent auditor, the ECA must remain separate from the influence of any Member State. It selects specific tasks at its own discretion and formulates its audit plan on the basis of criteria such as public interest, risk of irregularity or poor performance and potential for improvement. The ECA has recently made the decision to examine whether Member States have made effective contributions to the European Union's animal welfare objectives and whether compliance has been achieved with animal welfare legislation. This move constitutes the first ever dedicated assessment of animal welfare measures taken by the EU Commission and Member States.

It is proposed that five countries - Germany, France, Romania, Italy and Poland - be assessed in this current programme, with audit reports from the ECA expected to issue in late 2018. These inspections will focus specifically on policies relating to farm animals, with scrutiny to be applied not only to on-farm conditions but also to other important components of the industry such as transport and slaughter. Legislation on pet animals, as distinct from farmed animals, has not been developed at EU level but is among the topics suggested for discussion at the EU Platform on Animal Welfare.

The European Union has always ensured that animal welfare issues are assigned the highest priority. It has reinforced policy objectives with significant Rural Development contributions under the Common Agricultural Policy, which will contribute €1.5 billion to animal welfare payments from 2014 to 2020. I feel that this proposed ECA audit plan is an important development and displays both to worldwide markets, and to our own citizens, that animal welfare is a cornerstone of the EU Agriculture model.

While Ireland has not been selected for an audit on this occasion, officials of my Department are ready to facilitate and engage with members of any ECA audit team which may be assigned to this jurisdiction at a future date.

Forestry Management

70. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason his Department is not adopting the full suite of agroforestry measures that are

funded and provided for within the rural development regulation for farming and forestry; the further reason he is not actively encouraging the creation of linear riparian native woodlands on farms to act as buffers to collect nitrate and phosphate run off in view of the problem for farm sustainability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47043/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Agroforestry is included under its own grant and premium category as part of my Department's afforestation scheme. Applications for agroforestry are considered for silvopastoral systems for example, pasture/grazing/silage/hay. However, other systems may be considered on a site to site basis as long as the tree stocking rate is between 400-1000 trees per hectare, it is at least 0.5 of a hectare in area and at least 20 meters wide. The trees will be thinned out in time reducing numbers to between 160-250 trees per hectare, this will allow enough light to filter through the canopy enabling continued grass growth. Acceptable tree species include oak, sycamore and cherry. Other broadleaves and conifers will be considered on a site to site basis. Fruit and nut species can account for up to 15% of the trees planted.

Support for the establishment of demonstration plots for research purposes may also be considered under the afforestation scheme in the context of the Department's research programme.

The Forestry Programme 2014 -2020 introduced a new requirement with regard to the planting of native woodlands alongside water courses. Native woodlands must be included alongside aquatic buffer zones in water sensitive sites such as aquatic Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and sensitive fisheries areas. This will provide a filtration buffer zone slowing down runoff from upland areas and helping to prevent sediment reaching rivers and streams.

The Department's new environmental requirements also allows for limited planting within water setback areas. This comprises the planting of single, small groups and irregular belts of native species such as birch, rowan, oak and Scots pine, as site conditions allow. Strategic planting within water setbacks may help to deliver direct in-stream ecosystem services such as bank stabilisation, cooling/shading, and food drop into the aquatic ecosystem. Water setback planting must be agreed in advance with Inland Fisheries Ireland and (where relevant) the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

In addition, native woodland is actively encouraged and financially supported by my Department and this includes riparian woodland.

Veterinary Regimes Harmonisation

71. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the findings of the review of regional veterinary laboratories; if the Sligo laboratory will remain functioning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46941/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM) Laboratories are an integral part of the Department, providing critical scientific evidence and expertise (in animal health, food safety and plant sciences) which allows the Department to function effectively as a regulator, to deal with new and emerging risks and to rapidly respond to disease outbreaks and food safety incidents. The laboratories also provide valued services and advisory support to the farming community, the food industry and wider society.

The ambitious targets of the Agrifood industry for growth and development over the next decade, as set out in Food Wise 2025, must be underpinned by robust systems which protect and enhance our reputation as a producer of safe and wholesome food and one of the ways in which

we must respond to this challenge is by developing a long-term strategy for the laboratories - building on existing capability and expertise in animal health, food safety and plant sciences, and ensuring we achieve both operational and scientific excellence.

This was the primary reason for tasking a Working Group led by Prof. Alan Reilly to undertake a comprehensive review of the Department's Laboratories. This review has considered both the central laboratory complex at Backweston and the eight regional laboratories located at Athlone, Cork, Kilkenny, Limerick and Sligo. The Group has presented a report to the Department, which makes recommendations on:

- Oversight and co-ordination of the laboratories activities
- Re-organisation of Divisions and support functions within the Central Laboratory complex
- Options for the future development of the Regional Laboratories – with a view to improving disease investigative and surveillance capability but with the over-riding imperative of maintaining and enhancing services to farmers and
- Human resources management within the laboratories - with a focus on grading structures, career development opportunities and workforce planning

To date no decision has been taken in respect of the options proposed for the Regional Veterinary Laboratories (RVLs). My Department completed an initial consultative process with all relevant stakeholders on the Working Group report (including on the options for RVLs) earlier this year. A cost-benefit analysis (CBA) of the various options proposed will be undertaken shortly. My Department has tendered for independent economic expertise to carry out this CBA and a tender award notice has issued. Any decision I make on the RVLs, including Sligo, will be informed by the consultative process and the outcome of the cost-benefit analysis.

Brexit Issues

72. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which his Department has been in contact with the various producers throughout the country that have been affected by Brexit; the extent to which he will be in a position to offer tangible support with particular reference to particular sectors in the food chain more likely to be severely affected in the short term; if the attention of his EU colleagues has been drawn to the seriousness of the implications for the agri food sector; if the attention of the UK authorities has been drawn to the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47092/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Ever since the UK Referendum on Brexit, I and my Department have been actively engaged in assessing the impact of the vote on the Irish agrifood sector, consulting with appropriate stakeholders and engaging with the relevant politicians and institutions. This work is being done in conjunction with the overall Government response led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

One of the steps I undertook in the immediate aftermath of the vote was to establish a Consultative Committee of Stakeholders in order to ensure a full exchange of information on the potential implications of a UK exit from the EU for the agrifood sector in Ireland. I convened the first formal meeting of the Committee on 7 July 2016 and I have held three subsequent meetings.

This process was complemented by the All-Island Civic Dialogue process organised by the then Taoiseach. Under that process I hosted six sector-specific gatherings covering fourteen

different sectors, including fisheries. These engagements afforded me and my Department the opportunity to hear, at first hand, the difficulties and concerns of the sectors; and given that the process was an all island one, I had an opportunity to engage with stakeholders from Northern Ireland also.

I have also engaged with my counterparts in many other Member States in an effort to raise their awareness of the potential impact of an unfavourable Brexit agreement - or no agreement - not only on Ireland but on the EU agrifood sector generally. In this regard there is regular engagement with the Commission, the UK, including Northern Ireland, and other member states both at political and official level. I have had specific bilateral meetings with my counterparts in Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Estonia, Poland, France, Luxembourg, Austria, Belgium and Spain to seek to establish common ground on the Brexit issue.

I have had political engagement with the former NI Minister for Agriculture Michelle McIlveen, the former UK Secretary of State for DEFRA Andrea Leadsom and the UK Minister of State for Agriculture George Eustice. I have spoken by telephone with DEFRA's current Secretary of State, Michael Gove, and am meeting him in Dublin shortly. In all of these engagements I have emphasised, and will continue to emphasise, the potential impact a hard Brexit will have on the historical trading relationships between the two jurisdictions.

While the main impact to date of the Brexit vote has been the effect of sterling volatility on those businesses that have a significant trading relationship with the UK, the medium to long term threats include the possible introduction of tariffs on trade between the EU and UK, potential divergences in regulations and standards between the EU and UK, and the implications of border controls and certification requirements.

I and my Department, in cooperation with Government and other Departments and Agencies, are attempting to mitigate the consequences through a range of activities under two distinctive pillars – Competitiveness and Product/Market Diversification.

Under Competitiveness my Department introduced a number of measures in Budget 2017 to help minimise farm gate and business costs, including the introduction of €150m low cost loan scheme for primary producers, new agri-taxation measures and increased funding under the Rural Development and Seafood Development Programmes. Under Budget 2018 I have provided exchequer funding to support a €300m Brexit loan scheme, at least 40% of which will be available to food businesses, and my Department is working with SBCI to develop a similar scheme for primary producers and small businesses.

Under Product/Market Diversification I continue to support Bord Bia in its investment in market prioritisation initiatives, which are aimed at identifying potential diversification opportunities. Since the final quarter of 2016 I have provided Bord Bia with more than €14 million in additional funding for a programme of marketing and promotional activity in international and EU markets, and also in the UK.

I have also allocated an additional €2m to Teagasc to allow them to commence work on an €8.8m investment in a new National Food Innovation Hub which will help Irish food businesses to innovate and expand.

I wish to assure the House that I and the Government remain very focused on supporting the agrifood industry through the challenges ahead. I will continue to consult with the industry as the negotiations develop, and press Ireland's case for continued free access to the UK market, without tariffs or burdensome customs and administrative procedures.

Basic Payment Scheme

73. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the progress towards the programme for Government commitment to propose a lowering of the cap on basic payments. [47096/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The 2016 Programme for Government undertook to propose a lowering of the cap on basic payments from €150,000 to €100,000 during a mid term review of the CAP. Due to the ongoing simplification and modernisation programme of the existing CAP, it is unlikely that a mid term review of the existing CAP will now take place.

Since the 16th October 2015, the maximum amount payable to any one applicant under the Basic Payment Scheme in Ireland (excluding the Greening Payment) is capped at €150,000 per annum and this option is set down in Regulation 1307/2013, which establishes the current rules for direct payments to farmers under support schemes within the framework of the current CAP. Ireland actively supported the concept of a maximum level during the current CAP negotiations back in 2013. A further lowering of the limit would require a legislative change of the Basic Act 1307/2013 (Direct Payments Regulation) in Council.

I am however committed to addressing this matter in the context of the future reform of the CAP, with the Commission scheduled to publish a communication on CAP post 2020, on 29 November 2017.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Funding

74. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans for the additional €25 million of ANC funding; the way in which it will be allocated; and the rationale behind the allocation. [46938/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) Scheme is a very important source of financial support for farmers across the country, paying over €200 million each year to over 95,000 farmers. In view of this, the Programme for a Partnership Government included a commitment for a €25 million increase in funding for the Scheme in 2018. I am happy to confirm that this commitment was delivered in the recent budget.

There are a number of options in relation to how this additional €25 million can be allocated in 2018. These options are currently being examined, with a view to being in place for payment under the 2018 Scheme. Changes to payments under the scheme will require formal agreement with the EU Commission via a formal amendment of the Rural Development Programme, 2014-2020.

The 2017 ANC payments commenced on 19th September and to date over €187 million has been paid to some 87,000 farmers. Payments are continuing on a rolling basis as more farmers satisfy eligibility and stocking rate requirements.

I am pleased to note that 2017 payments are ahead of where they were this time last year.

GLAS Administration

75. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to re-open the GLAS scheme for new entrants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [46930/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The target set out in the Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020 to approve 50,000 GLAS participants before the end of 2018 has already been achieved. The fact that the RDP target has been achieved almost two years ahead of schedule is a significant achievement on the part of both farmers and my Department and is evidence of the commitment of Irish farmers to the sustainable growth of the Irish agr-food sector into the future.

There are no plans to re-open the scheme. My focus now is on ensuring that payments to these participants are processed and my Department is working hard to begin making these 2017 advance payments in the coming weeks. The GLAS scheme is one of a suite of many RDP schemes and the re-opening of any scheme can only be considered within the overall RDP budget which is currently fully committed.

All GLAS applications must pass regulatory controls and validations as is the case with all EU co-funded schemes. Each application must pass the full suite of checks before it can be approved for payment.

The main issue holding up the payment of outstanding 2016 claims which will also hold up 2017 advance payments is the fact that some participants have not yet submitted a Nutrient Management Plan (NMP). This is a core requirement of participation in GLAS. As of November 3rd there were 5,275 NMPs outstanding. I urge all GLAS participants to attend to this urgently so that outstanding balancing payments and future payments can issue and to ensure ongoing participation in the GLAS Scheme.

Every effort is being made in order to ensure that payments are issued without delay. Further payment runs will be made on a weekly basis as cases are cleared including when NMPs are submitted. The aim now is to pay as many participants as possible their 2017 advance payment.

Beef Industry

76. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the latest Mercosur talks at EU level; and the steps he is taking to protect Irish beef farmers by ensuring that beef does not form part of the final Mercosur deal. [47098/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I was deeply disappointed that the Commission decided to offer a significant tariff rate quota for beef of 70,000 tonnes during the last round of negotiations. I believe that this could not be coming at a worse time for the EU beef sector.

I and my officials have been very active in highlighting the potentially very damaging impact of a Mercosur deal on the European agriculture sector, and on the beef sector in particular. We continue to monitor the situation closely and respond as appropriate to developments in order to defend the interests of Irish farmers, working in close co-operation with my Government colleagues, particularly the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, and the Taoiseach.

At political level, I have continuously raised the issue with my Member State colleagues

and with Commissioners Hogan and Malmström, both within the Council of Agriculture Ministers and in written form. These efforts have been reinforced at official level through similar contacts with Member States and the Commission, particularly through the Special Committee on Agriculture and the Trade Policy Committee. The Taoiseach has also raised the matter with Presidents Junker and Macron.

Most recently Ireland made the latest in a series of very strong interventions on this matter at the Trade Policy Committee in Brussels on 27 October, and I raised the matter at the Council of Agriculture Ministers in Luxembourg in October and again in Brussels this week. I have also worked very closely with a number of other Member States, most notably France, including in the production of a joint paper that was submitted to the European Commission on 26 September outlining our shared concerns. And I wrote to Commissioner Malmström in early October reiterating my concerns in relation to the tabling of a beef tariff rate quota offer by the EU during the most recent round of negotiations.

I believe there is a need for continued vigilance in relation to the conduct of these trade negotiations, and I will continue to insist that they are handled appropriately, and in a manner that safeguards the interests of the Irish and European beef sector. In this regard I believe full account must be taken of the findings of the Commission's own assessment of the cumulative impact of trade deals on the agrifood sector, and the potentially very damaging impact of Brexit on an already delicately balanced EU beef market.

Central Statistics Office

77. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the allocation for 2018 to the CSO. [47085/17]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Joe McHugh): The current net allocation for 2018 as detailed in Budget 2018 amounts to €48.447m.

2018 Allocation Breakdown

Subhead	€m
A (i) Salaries, Wages & Allowances	40.188
A (ii) Travel & Subsistence	1.200
A (iii) Training & Development & Incidental Expenses	1.100
A (iv) Postal & Telecommunications Services	0.800
A (v) Office Equipment & External IT Services	4.103
A (vi) Office Premises Expenses	1.000
A (vii) Consultancy Services & Value for Money & Policy Reviews	0.070
A (viii) Collection of Statistics - Pay	0.650
A (viii) Collection of Statistics - Non Pay	1.236
Gross	50.347
B. Appropriations-in-Aid	1.900
Net	48.447

IDA Ireland Data

78. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the names of all potential investors that have expressed an interest in locating in Drogheda or have met the IDA regarding same in the past five years. [47205/17]

79. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the names of all potential investors that have expressed an interest in expanding an existing business in Drogheda and have met with the IDA regarding same in the past five years. [47206/17]

80. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the names of all potential investors that have visited Drogheda IDA business park in the past five years. [47207/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 78 to 80, inclusive, together.

Regional development is a top priority of mine and I am determined to help drive job creation all over Ireland. Increasing and sustaining foreign direct investment (FDI) outside of our main urban areas - including in Counties Meath and Louth - represents a vital part of this.

Drogheda remains an attractive destination for FDI given its track record as a home to multinational companies, the excellent local infrastructure and its proximity to Dublin and the capital's transport hubs. The wider Meath and Louth areas also benefit from these advantages, which helps explain why there are a total of 38 IDA client companies employing over 5,000 people in the two counties combined.

The IDA continues to seek new investment for the Drogheda area. The Agency has a Business Park in the town which is already home to one client and which could support further investment. The sites available at that Park are actively marketed to overseas companies. Information on those companies that may be considered potential investors cannot, however, be released on grounds of confidentiality and commercial sensitivity.

Two IDA client companies which have confirmed new investment for Drogheda in recent years are Kelton Tech and Mobile Technologies Inc. These businesses have indicated they plan on creating 250 jobs in the town and the IDA hopes that further such investment can be secured for Drogheda in the time ahead.

The following table sets out details on the number of site visits to counties Meath and Louth from 2013 to quarter three of this year.

County	2013	2014	2015	2016	Q3 2017
Meath	1	2	7	8	1
Louth	4	10	20	24	14

Enterprise Ireland Funding

81. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the Irish companies that had stands at the defence and security equipment international exhibition in London from 12 to 15 September 2017; if they received State support to attend - for example, from the Enterprise Ireland internationalisation grant; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47273/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The Enterprise Ireland Internationalisation Grant is designed to assist established client companies to research and explore business opportunities in international markets. This grant instrument is primarily designed to support the costs of undertaking new market research and cannot directly support sales activity.

I can confirm that Enterprise Ireland has not funded any of its client companies to attend the defence and security equipment international exhibition in London.

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement

82. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the steps she is taking to address identified shortcomings within the ODCE while the process of establishing a new corporate enforcement agency is under way; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47316/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): While it is crucial to identify and learn from any shortcomings in the investigative process, it is also important to recognise the valuable role the ODCE has played and continues to play in facilitating compliance and enforcement of company law.

Organisational reforms in the ODCE were commenced in 2012 by the current Director of Corporate Enforcement to ensure a more efficient and effective use of its resources. These improvements include:

- Reorganising the structures of the Office;
- Recruiting additional expertise, most notably six forensic accountants and a digital forensics specialist;
- Fundamentally amending the investigative procedures used by the Office, with members of An Garda Síochána now taking the lead on all criminal investigations; and
- Fostering a greater culture of risk management.

The structure and operation of the new Agency will build on these important advances and incorporate lessons learned in recent years.

The decision to establish the ODCE as a new independent agency will give the Director greater autonomy and flexibility and ensure that the Agency is better equipped to investigate increasingly complex breaches of company law.

In addition, the new Agency will be established in line with international best practice, including its internal controls, staffing, budget and corporate governance etc. My Department will engage with the OECD to seek their assistance in taking account of international best practice in the establishment of the Agency.

Furthermore, the Companies Act 2014 enshrines substantial and wide-ranging powers for the Director of Corporate Enforcement. Government is committed to ensuring that the Companies Act 2014 continues to deliver a robust yet competitive corporate regulatory framework for business in Ireland. Consequently, the provisions of the Companies Act 2014 are under continuous review.

Any further powers that are identified as a requirement for carrying out the functions of the Agency will be explored and made under statute as appropriate.

The Government remains committed to refining and developing Ireland's response to criminal activity and regulatory crime and ensure that, like every other jurisdiction, we continue to respond to emerging challenges. This recently launched package of measures to combat "white collar crime" is designed to both strengthen and further review what is required to tackle such

crimes.

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Data

83. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of requests for additional funding, staff resources or expertise that have been made by the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement in each of the past four years; the number of such requests that have been met in full; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47317/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): Following his appointment in the latter half of 2012, the Director carried out a review of the ODCE's then skills mix and operational capacity. That review, inter alia, identified certain skill deficiencies, as a consequence of which sanction was sought, and subsequently obtained, to recruit a number of additional professional staff to address the identified need.

Further to that process, the Department, through the Public Appointments Service, recruited six suitably qualified and experienced forensic accountants together with a suitably qualified and experienced digital forensics specialist, for assignment to the ODCE.

Over recent years, a number of senior-level vacancies have arisen within the ODCE through a combination of retirement, promotion and transfer to other parts of the public service. In that context, the skill sets, competencies, roles and responsibilities associated with each of those posts have been reviewed and reconfigured by the Director to better reflect the organisation's current needs. That exercise has resulted in two senior-level professional posts of Enforcement Portfolio Manager being created, with one of those posts having been filled recently and the filling of the other expected shortly. In the same context, the Department is currently engaging with the Public Appointments Service to fill, through open competition, two currently vacant Forensic Accountant positions as well as a reconfigured senior role of Enforcement Legal Adviser.

The ODCE also has an approved complement of seven members of An Garda Síochána (one Detective Inspector, two Detective Sergeants and four Detective Gardaí). A vacancy arose in regard to the Detective Inspector post. I understand from An Garda Síochána that an allocation of a Detective Inspector, who also had other duties, was made to the post. This post is among a number of Detective Inspector posts which will shortly be the subject of a promotions competition.

No requests for additional funding have been made by the ODCE in the last four years.

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Staff

84. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number and nature of posts, by head count and in whole time equivalent terms in the ODCE in each of the past four years; the number of vacant posts in the ODCE; the details of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47318/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The staffing complement of the ODCE for the years requested by the Deputy is set out in the table.

Following his appointment in the latter half of 2012, the Director carried out a review of

the ODCE's then skills mix and operational capacity. That review, inter alia, identified certain skill deficiencies, as a consequence of which sanction was sought, and subsequently obtained, to recruit a number of additional professional staff to address the identified need.

Further to that process, the Department, through the Public Appointments Service, recruited six suitably qualified and experienced forensic accountants together with a suitably qualified and experienced digital forensics specialist, for assignment to the ODCE.

Over recent years, a number of senior-level vacancies have arisen within the ODCE through a combination of retirement, promotion and transfer to other parts of the public service. In that context, the skill sets, competencies, roles and responsibilities associated with each of those posts have been reviewed and reconfigured by the Director to better reflect the organisation's current needs. That exercise has resulted in two senior-level professional posts of Enforcement Portfolio Manager being created, with one of those posts having been filled recently and the filling of the other expected shortly. In the same context, the Department is currently engaging with the Public Appointments Service to fill, through open competition, two currently vacant Forensic Accountant positions as well as a reconfigured senior role of Enforcement Legal Adviser.

The ODCE also has an approved complement of seven members of An Garda Síochána (one Detective Inspector, two Detective Sergeants and four Detective Gardaí). A vacancy arose in regard to the Detective Inspector post. I understand from An Garda Síochána that an allocation of a Detective Inspector, who also had other duties, was made to the post. This post is among a number of Detective Inspector posts which will shortly be the subject of a promotions competition.

No. of staff* serving in the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE) (2014-2017)

-	2014		2015		2016		2017**	
GRADE	Headcount	FTE	Headcount	FTE	Headcount	FTE	Headcount	FTE
Director	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Corporate Compliance Manager	1	1	1	1	0	0	-	-
Digital Forensics Specialist (new post in 2017)	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Enforcement Portfolio Manager	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Legal Adviser (1 post reconfigured in 2017 to Enforcement Legal Adviser)	3	3	3	3	2	2	1	1
Enforcement Legal Adviser (new post in 2017)	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
Principal Solicitor	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	-
Principal Officer	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Professional Accountant Grade 1	1	1	0	0	5	5	5	5
Solicitor	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
Assistant Principal Officer	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Higher Executive Officer	8	7	8	7	8	7	8	6.6
Executive Officer	6	5.8	6	5.8	5	5	5	4.5
Clerical Officer	8	6.7	8	6.9	8	6.7	8	6.7
Total	35	32.5	33	30.7	35	32.7	35	31.8
Gardai***		7		6		5		5

* Headcount = number of persons, FTE = "Full-time Equivalent" posts/staff

** Staffing as at end-October 2017

*** Under a 1999 Government Decision, the ODCE is allocated an approved complement of 7 Gardaí members of an An Garda Síochána.

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Expenditure

85. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the amount spent on payroll in the ODCE in each of the past four years; the amount spent on temporary staff in each of the past four years; the amount spent on outside expertise in each of the past four years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47319/17]

Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The pay allocation and expenditure in relation to the Office of Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE) is set out in the table:

	Pay allocation	Pay expenditure at year end
2014	€2.465m	€2.216m
2015	€2.884m	€2.156m
2016	€2.808m	€2.006m
2017 (to end of September)	€2.838m	€1.525m

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

The ODCE also has an approved complement of seven members of An Garda Síochána (one Detective Inspector, two Detective Sergeants and four Detective Gardaí) to assist with its criminal investigation / prosecution functions. At this time there is one vacancy in that approved complement (the Detective Inspector post). The pay related costs for the Gardaí assigned to the ODCE are borne by the Department of Justice and Equality Vote and such pay costs are not reflected in the financial table above.

Specific provision was made in the Office's 2015 pay allocation to allow for the recruitment of additional staff, including additional specialist staff such as 7 forensic accountants. The reality, however, has been that notwithstanding the increased pay allocation, it has taken some time to effect the recruitment of the specialist staff concerned. Nonetheless, 6 additional forensic accountants were recruited. A Digital Forensic Specialist post has been filled since the start of the year.

Over recent years, a number of senior-level vacancies have arisen within the ODCE through a combination of retirement, promotion and transfer to other parts of the public service. In that context, the skill sets, competencies, roles and responsibilities associated with each of those posts have been reviewed and reconfigured by the Director to better reflect the organisation's current needs. That exercise has resulted in two senior-level professional posts of Enforcement Portfolio Manager being created, with one of those posts having been filled recently and the filling of the other expected shortly. Beyond this there are a small number of vacancies, that my Department is currently working with the ODCE to fill.

The following table gives the amount spent on temporary staff in each of the past four years; along with the amount spent on outside expertise (anyone hired on a short-term contract to work on any investigation) in each of the past four years:

ODCE	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
Temp. Contract worker-legal secretary	€56,309.00	€57,628.00	€40,077.00	Nil	€154,014.00
Outside Expertise					
Mazars	€29,520.00	€178,733.00	Nil	Nil to date	€208,253.00
Espion	0	€7,380.00	€10,258.00	€6,855.00 to date	€24,493.00
Glenbeigh	0	0	€56,449.00	0	€56,449.00
Deloitte	0	€23,249.00	€8,261.00	0	€31,510.00
Total Outside Expertise	€29,520.00	€209,362.00	€74,968.00	€6,855.00 to date	€320,705.00

Housing Data

86. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of new housing units that will be built by Home Building Finance Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47246/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As announced in my Budget speech on 10 October 2017, it is my intention to establish Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFI) to provide funding on market terms to viable residential development projects whose owners are experiencing difficulty in obtaining debt funding. HBFI will be a standalone entity which will provide funding directly into the market.

It is important to note that HBFI would not be directly involved in development as suggested by the Deputy's question. Its role would be solely as a commercial lender akin to a bank or private equity investor. HBFI will be lending on commercial, market-equivalent terms and conditions, which would depend on the risk profile of each individual project, the quality of collateral and the creditworthiness of the borrower.

With a proposed allocation of up to €750m, it is estimated that HBFI could have capacity to fund about 6,000 homes in the coming years depending on demand in the market. The current estimated shortfall in residential supply is 15,000 – 20,000 units per annum and, accordingly, HBFI, with an annual average delivery of up to 2,000 homes, would reduce this shortfall by about 10% (assuming a three year horizon). This would be a significant contribution but it would not make HBFI a dominant player in the residential funding market and it would clearly leave room for banks and other finance providers to increase their contribution to funding much-needed residential development.

State Savings Schemes Administration

87. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the reason some State savings that matured in October 2017 were delayed; if the NTMA suffered an information technology issue which caused a delay; the extent of this information technology problem; the sections of the NTMA operations that were affected; the guarantees being put in place to ensure a similar situation does not arise again; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47155/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The NTMA have advised me that An Post acts as an agent of the NTMA in the administration of State Savings. The incident the Deputy refers to, related to An Post operational issue. No NTMA systems were impacted.

Due to the operational issue in An Post, there was an error in issuing maturity notices for

one State Savings product that lasted approximately 2 weeks. All customers affected have since received their maturity notices and a letter of apology has been sent to these customers.

As a result of the issue, all An Post systems were reviewed to confirm the issue had not affected any other State Savings products. An Post procedures have been revised to address this issue.

Alcohol Pricing

88. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address a matter (details supplied) regarding VAT and excise. [47168/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I believe the issue the Deputy is referring to is that of below cost selling of alcohol products.

The remit of my Department extends to the taxation placed on alcohol products. The issue of below cost selling is a matter in the first instance for my colleague the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

The prohibition on below cost selling was removed when the Groceries Order was abolished in 2006 by the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. It was removed to spur greater competition into the grocery trade by allowing retailers freedom to determine how they price their products. Any moves to directly prohibit this practice would possibly be contrary to EU State Aid rules.

However, the Deputy may be aware that, in respect of the price of alcohol, my colleague the Minister for Health is currently bringing forward legislation to tackle the issue of cheap alcohol. The Public Health (Alcohol) Bill contains a provision for a minimum price on each unit of alcohol sold, regardless of the point of sale. This should go some way to addressing issues arising from the sale of cheap alcohol.

Banking Sector

89. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach with a draft copy of the report being completed by his Department relative to public banking; if he will arrange for the committee to have an input into this report in view of the public hearings it has held on the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47180/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for a Partnership Government commits the Government to thoroughly investigating the German Sparkassen model for the development of local public banks that operate within well-defined regions. The purpose of the consultation process and report is to assist the Government in its analysis of local public banking in an Irish context. My Department and the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, now the Department of Community and Rural Development, were tasked with fulfilling this Programme for a Partnership Government commitment.

The investigation of local public banking has consisted of a consultation process with stakeholders and interested parties, including the Savings Banks Foundation for International Cooperation (SBFIC). Officials from the Department of Rural and Community Development and my department have met with representatives from SBFIC a number of times. Officials have been

provided with a detailed proposal and presentation on the Sparkasse model and its potential implementation in an Irish context by SBFIC.

I can confirm that officials in my Department are working jointly with colleagues in the Department of Community and Rural Development in order to prepare a report of the findings of their investigation. It is expected that the report will be completed in the near future. It will describe the current Irish banking environment, outline the Sparkasse and Kiwibank business models, detail the proposal for local public banking in Ireland received from Irish Rural Link and SBFIC, summarise the views of respondents to the consultation process and set out findings in relation to the potential for a local public banking model in Ireland.

The completed report will be presented jointly to the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Michael Ring T.D., and myself. The report will then be brought to Government, for Cabinet Approval. Once the report has been brought to Government, a copy will be provided to the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure, and Reform and Taoiseach.

Tracker Mortgage Examination

90. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if the staff members of a bank (details supplied) that had their tracker mortgage removed will be covered by the Central Bank's examination process and by the bank's redress and compensation scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47184/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy's question was referred to the bank by officials in the Department who were provided with the following response:

"Bank of Ireland is currently conducting its examination of tracker mortgage related issues which covers, amongst other things, transparency of communications with and contractual rights of tracker mortgage customers. This is an industry wide review required by the Central Bank of Ireland. All tracker mortgages sold by the Bank are covered by the examination. Bank of Ireland provided an update on this matter on 25 October 2017, available below, which sets out that Bank of Ireland will start the compensation process for c.4,300 customers from 10 November, and in line with the requirements of the Central Bank's Tracker Examination Framework, will continue to review whether other customers should be included in the compensation process. A further update will be provided in mid- November."

<https://www.bankofireland.com/about-bank-of-ireland/press-room/press-releases/item/632/bank-of-ireland-ceo-personally-commits-to-resolving-tracker-mortgage-issue-as-quickly-as-possible/#october>.

Help-To-Buy Scheme Eligibility

91. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if a person who buys a newly built house as a first-time buyer from a company under a NAMA-approved receiver and the company is not on the Revenues Commissioners' list of qualified contractors for the purposes of the help-to-buy scheme has recourse in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47194/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 477C of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides that for a first time purchaser to be eligible for the Help-to-Buy (HTB) scheme, he or she must enter into a contract with a qualifying contractor. If first-time purchas-

ers do not purchase from a qualifying contractor, it is not an eligible house purchase.

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

Financial Services Ombudsman Remit

92. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance if financial institutions are legally obliged to comply with the Office of the Financial Ombudsman when a request is made of them. [47209/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Firstly, I must point out that the Financial Services Ombudsman is independent in the carrying out of his duties. I have no role in the day to day workings of the office or in the decisions which he takes.

One of the main roles of the Financial Services Ombudsman (FSO) is to investigate, mediate and adjudicate complaints about the conduct of regulated financial service providers. Investigations by the Financial Services Ombudsman are free of charge to the consumer.

I have been advised by the Financial Services Ombudsman that he can require a regulated financial service provider to provide information either orally or in writing, or to produce any document or other record, or to provide a copy of any document.

The Ombudsman can also summon any officer, member, agent or employee of a financial service provider to attend before him, and he can examine on oath any such officer, member, agent or employee in relation to any matter that appears to the Ombudsman to be relevant to an investigation or adjudication.

The FSO may apply to the Circuit Court for a compliance order against a person if it appears to the Ombudsman that the person has failed to comply with such a request.

Furthermore, a person who obstructs the Ombudsman in the exercise of his functions or without reasonable excuse, fails to comply with a requirement or request made by the Ombudsman or gives information that the person knows to be false or misleading, or refuses to comply with a summons to attend before, or to be examined on oath by, the Ombudsman, commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding €2,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three months or both.

Financial Services Ombudsman Staff

93. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether the Office of the Financial Ombudsman is adequately staffed; and the staffing levels and budget allocation of the office for the past five years, in tabular form. [47210/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Firstly, I must point out that the Financial Services Ombudsman is independent in the performance of his statutory functions. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on how he performs his duties.

I have been advised by the Financial Services Ombudsman that he keeps the adequacy of staffing levels in the Office under constant review. The Office has just completed a public recruitment process and will be appointing both permanent and temporary staff to meet current

demands in the coming weeks. The Ombudsman is satisfied that this will meet current needs. Staffing levels will continue to be kept under review in line with demand levels.

The Ombudsman also informed me that staff of the Office have the necessary range of qualifications, skills and experience to deliver on their mandate. These include qualifications and experience in the areas of mediation, investigation, legal, financial and corporate governance.

I have been informed that the budget allocation is as follows:-

Year	Budget Allocation
2017	5,932,136
2016	5,815,903
2015	5,591,304
2014	6,285,787
2013	6,193,574

I have also been informed that the staffing levels in the Bureau are as follows:-

YEAR	Staffing Levels	LONG TERM LEAVE
2017	43	which includes 5 on maternity leave and career break
2016	34	Plus 2 people on a career break
2015	28	Plus 3 people on a career break
2014	34	Plus 2 people on a career break
2013	38	Plus 1 person on a career break

I understand that the FSO wrote to all members of the Houses of the Oireachtas earlier this year informing them of the Protocol for the Provision of Information to Members of the Oireachtas by State Bodies and providing a dedicated email address for the timely provision of information to members of the Oireachtas.

Stamp Duty

94. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank has a policy on whether ATM machines should dispense €10 notes to persons; the position regarding the practice of retail banks in relation to dispensing €10 notes; if there is a policy on whether the use of €20 notes or €50 notes is preferred in cases in which an amount of €100 is required by a person; the data on the denominations of notes dispensed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47218/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by the Central Bank that a recommendation of the National Payments Plan targeted a significant increase in the number of €10 and €20 banknotes dispensed from Irish ATMs, with a view to making lower denomination notes more available to cash users.

Building on that recommendation, the Central Bank has set targets for the banks to achieve in terms of issuance of €10, €20 and €50 notes from non-retailer ATMs by 2018. These targets were calculated following a study of the requirements of consumers, given patterns of cash usage.

The targets are that 6-10% of all notes by volume are to be €10 notes by the end of 2018, 40-45% of all notes by volume are to be €20 notes and 45-50% of all notes by volume are to be

€50 notes. The latest available data, for Q3 2017, on amounts actually dispensed show that 8% of all notes are €10 notes, 36% of all notes are €20 notes and 56% of all notes are €50 notes.

The Central Bank requests regular updates from the commercial banks on their progress towards achieving these targets and continues to challenge them in relation to the number of €10 and €20 banknotes being dispensed from their ATMs. This topic is a permanent agenda item at the National Cash Forum which is chaired by the Central Bank, and is also discussed at bilateral meetings with banks by the Central Bank.

Stamp Duty

95. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Finance if commercial sales contracts signed prior to budget 2018 will be closed with immediate effect and not have to wait until mid-December 2017 when the Finance Bill 2017 is enacted in view of the additional and major costs that will be incurred in the interim. [47251/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The rate of Stamp Duty on commercial property was increased to 6% by way of Budget Day Resolution and applies in relation to all relevant conveyances executed after midnight on Budget day. In order to avoid changing the cost structures of contracts entered into prior to that date, I have introduced measures in the Finance Bill that will allow for the lower rate of 2% to continue to apply to contracts where the parties entered into binding contracts prior to the commencement of the new rate and where the conveyance is executed on or before 31 December of this year. These transitional measures will come into effect on the enactment of the Finance Bill.

I am advised by Revenue that it has now put arrangements in place for these transitional measures. A person who files a stamp duty return before the enactment of the Finance Bill and who is satisfied that the transitional measures would apply if the Finance Bill was enacted, has two options. He or she may-

1. File a return through the e-stamping system, pay stamp duty at the rate of 6% and be issued with a stamp certificate. On enactment of the Finance Bill, the filer can then request a refund of the difference in the stamp duty paid between the 2% and 6% rates by amending the return and submitting the relevant documentation to Revenue, or

2. File a return through the e-stamping system and pay the stamp duty at the rate of 2%, in which case a stamp certificate will not be issued. On enactment of the Finance Bill, Revenue will publish information on how the postponed stamp certificate can be obtained.

Tax Agreements

96. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance further to Questions Nos. 123 to 125, inclusive, of 17 October 2017, the analysis of cases settled by way of mutual agreement procedures, MAPs; the year and the amount of tax involved; the number of settlements open under MAPs; the tax potentially at risk; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47306/17]

97. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of advance pricing arrangements the Revenue Commissioners have agreed and which are currently in place, by country; the number of companies involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47307/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 96

and 97 together.

I am informed by Revenue that there are currently 29 open Mutual Agreement Procedure (“MAP”) cases. These relate to adjustments raised by tax authorities in Tax Treaty partner countries in respect of transfer-pricing or the attribution of profits to permanent establishments. Some of these cases are at an early stage and Revenue has not yet received sufficient information to estimate the potential Irish tax relief that could result from closing the cases. For those cases where the potential relief is known, the maximum aggregate tax value of the relief could amount to €243m. However, while this aggregate value is based on granting relief for the full foreign adjustments, the total relief ultimately granted is likely to be less, as a result of the withdrawal or reduction of the foreign adjustments concerned on the conclusion of the MAP negotiations.

The following table includes the number of MAP requests made by companies for each of the years 2008 to 2016 and to date in 2017, together with the number of requests where tax relief was granted and the tax value of the relief involved:

Year of MAP request	Number of requests received for MAP assistance	Number of these requests where relief granted	Tax value of relief involved *
2008	2	1 (1 case was withdrawn)	**
2009	6	4 (1 case where no relief was granted, and 1 case is still open)	€6.6m
2010	9	3 (4 cases were withdrawn, 1 case where no relief was granted, and 1 case is still open)	€3.5m
2011	4	2 (1 case was withdrawn, and 1 case where no relief was granted)	€0.9m
2012	5	2 (2 cases were withdrawn, and 1 case is still open)	€0.1m
2013	7	4 (1 case was withdrawn, and 2 cases are still open)	€4.8m
2014	12	2 (1 case was withdrawn, 1 case where no relief was granted, and 8 cases are still open)	€4.7m
2015	8	1 (2 cases were withdrawn, 1 case where no relief was granted, and 4 cases are still open)	**
2016	8	3 (5 cases are still open)	€1.8m
2017	8	0 (1 case was withdrawn, and 7 cases are still open)	€0.0m

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

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

With respect to Question No. 47307/17, a bilateral Advance Pricing Arrangement, referred to as a bilateral APA, is a binding agreement between two tax administrations, which is entered into by reference to the relevant Double Taxation Agreement. A bilateral APA governs the treatment for tax purposes of future transactions between associated taxpayers for a fixed period, generally 3 to 5 years.

I am informed by Revenue that there are 4 APAs currently in place with other countries. The APAs relate to 4 separate Irish companies. To observe taxpayer confidentiality, the OECD approach when reporting statistics is not to identify individual countries where there is a small number of agreements with those countries. The four current APAs have been agreed by Revenue with the tax administrations of two OECD countries and there are two agreements with each of these countries.

Tax Settlements

98. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that with the current rate of progress at the Tax Appeals Commission it will take approximately 17 years to hear cases (details supplied); his plans to introduce measures to expedite the processing of these cases; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47308/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): It is accepted that it will take time to move through the significant number of appeals that are on hands in the Tax Appeals Commission (“TAC”). These appeals fall into three categories:

(i) Those that have been notified directly to the TAC, following its establishment in March 2016;

(ii) Those that were submitted to the Revenue Commissioners prior to the commencement of the TAC and which transferred to the TAC during 2016

(iii) Those that were on hand in the Office of the Appeal Commissioners prior to establishment of the TAC and which automatically transferred to the TAC.

The appeals in categories (ii) and (iii) above make up a substantial amount of the current casework in the TAC and I am advised that much of the delay in progressing those matters towards settlement, has been outside of the TAC’s control.

I am advised that not all appeals are of the same complexity or magnitude. Therefore it is to be expected that consideration of larger and more complex appeals may take more time than others which can, or will move towards settlement, more quickly. That being the case, I am advised that it is unlikely that the current appeals will take 17 years to settle. I am also advised, by the TAC, that now its new case management system is almost fully functional, the Commission is getting to a position where it can run more case management conferences and more leader/follower appeals, whereby in the first instance, some appeals may be settled more quickly because of earlier interaction with the TAC; and in the second instance, more appeals may settle by virtue of the outcome in a “leader” case, which has bearing on all the “follower” appeals. I am further advised that this desired outcome is already taking effect, with appeals settling or closing this week, on foot of case management conferences.

Nevertheless, I am mindful that it is also the case that there are a large number of appeals to be settled and more being notified each month. Although a reasonable timeframe for settling all must be allowed, I accept that the TAC needs additional resources to ensure an efficient and effective appeals process is available to taxpayers. A new, temporary Commissioner has been appointed to deal with the “legacy” cases and I am advised that a series of case management conferences, dealing with a large volume of those appeals, have begun and will continue through December. The TAC anticipates that these conferences will result in many of the appeals settling or closing at that stage. Likewise, a series of these conferences are being scheduled for December, in respect of “current” appeals. In addition, the Commission has identified procedural improvements which it considers may help to expedite appeals and I am advised it has requested a review of some of its proposals by the Office of the Attorney General and awaits a response. Furthermore, the TAC has put proposals to my Department in relation to additional resources – staff and facilities - and addressing these issues quickly will, I understand from the Commission, lead to an improvement in terms of the rate and timing of appeals being settled or closed.

99. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he will request the Revenue Commissioners to offer alternative methods of settlement such as arbitration to persons in view of the fact that a prompt hearing before the Tax Appeals Commission is impossible in relation to the huge number of open appeals against tax assessments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47309/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Tax Appeals Commission (TAC) is an independent statutory body whose main task is hearing, determining and disposing of appeals against assessments and decisions of the Revenue Commissioners concerning taxes and duties in accordance with relevant legislation.

I am advised by Revenue that it is always willing to engage in meaningful settlement discussions with appellants, even after an appeal has been made to the TAC. Indeed, it has always been the case that a large number of appeals are settled by agreement between the parties rather than by being determined by the Appeal Commissioners. Such settlement discussions routinely involve a professional adviser retained by the taxpayer in question. This type of settlement, however, is more likely where the dispute involves the amount of a tax liability or there is a difference of opinion in relation to the facts of a case. There are many cases where there is no potential for informal settlement, in particular with appeals that involve the determination of a point of law.

The Appeal Commissioners were specifically recruited because of their expertise and ability to adjudicate and determine disputes involving complex tax matters. It is appropriate that tax disputes involving points of law and complex tax matters continue to be determined by them, where the matter cannot be resolved directly between the parties.

I am also advised that Revenue's understanding of arbitration is that an independent arbitrator makes a decision in a dispute that is binding on all parties. Revenue does not consider that this would be appropriate in the context of complex tax disputes. In certain cases, where Revenue does not agree with the determination of the TAC, and the matter may create a precedent that has significant implications for the Exchequer, it is important Revenue has the option of appealing the determination to the Courts.

Tax Appeals Commission

100. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of appeals heard by the Tax Appeals Commission in each month since its formation; the number of determinations still outstanding for each of those months, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47310/17]

101. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of appeals heard by the Tax Appeals Commission in each month since its formation, by tax head, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47311/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 100 and 101 together.

I am informed by the Tax Appeals Commission that, as of 3 November 2017, 106 hearings have taken place since the establishment of the Tax Appeals Commission in March 2016, to include a number of case management conferences. I am advised that case management conferences can be held for a number of reasons however they are primarily to facilitate the speedy resolution of appeals. During a hearing, a number of tax issues can be raised for consideration, and in this regard the table below highlights the main tax head elements raised during the hear-

ings.

	Cases Heard	Determinations Outstanding	Appeals by Tax Head
Mar-16	4	2	IT; Sec 993(1)(d)(iii); VRT
Apr-16	11	2	CAT; DIRT; VAT; Sec 993(1)(d)(iii); IT; IT & VAT; SPFTC;
May-16	7	1	VRT; Dom Levy; IT & VAT; CGT
Jun-16	4	2	CD; IT; CGT; CAT
Jul-16	5	0	IT; CGT; CT; VRT; PAYE/ PRSI
Aug-16	0	3	
Sep-16*	7	2	IT & VAT; VRT; IT; Sec 993(1)(d)(iii); CT; CAT
Oct-16	7	2	IT; Artist; RCT; VAT
Nov-16	9	2	VAT; VRT; Sec 993(1)(d)(iii); CAT; IT; Artist
Dec-16	8	3	IT; VRT
Jan-17	6	5	VAT; IT; CT
Feb-17	8	3	IT; CT; CGT; Artist
Mar-17	3	0	CT; VRT; IT
Apr-17	0	5	
May-17	7	5	CGT; VAT; Sec 993(1)(d)(iii); IT; IT & VAT
Jun-17	8	1	CGT; IT; VAT; CAT; Mineral
Jul-17	4	0	IT; CGT
Aug-17	2	0	IT
Sep-17	4	1	IT; LPT
Oct-17	2	0	VRT; SD
Nov-17	0	0	
Total	106	39	

*In one case, notwithstanding a determination has issued, a further hearing has been requested

Key	
IT	Income Tax
LPT	Local Property Tax
CT	Corporation Tax
VRT	Vehicle Registration Tax
Sec 993(1)(d)(iii)	Appeal as to validity of Revenue refusing appeal
CAT	Capital Acquisitions Tax
DIRT	Deposit Interest Retention Tax
VAT	Value Added Tax
Dom Levy	Domicile Levy
CGT	Capital Gains Tax
Artist	Artist Exemption
RCT	Relevant Contractor Tax
Mineral	Mineral Oil Tax
CD	Customs Duty

Exchequer Returns

102. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the appropriate annual percentage multiplier for increases in general government tax revenue relative to GDP, GNP and GNI growth, for example, the amount each point of growth would be expected to be reflected in tax revenue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47313/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There is no clear guide as to the impact of different growth rates of GDP, GNP or GNI on general government revenue as the exact effect is a function of the composition of growth. For example, increased economic activity driven by exports does not have as significant an impact on the public finances as, for example, domestically driven growth.

As a general rule of thumb, assuming no change in tax policy, every increase of 1 percentage point of nominal GDP will result in about a 1 percentage point increase in general government revenue.

Help-To-Buy Scheme Eligibility

103. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Finance if the case of persons (details supplied) in County Kildare who have applied for the help-to-buy scheme can be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47322/17]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Help-to-Buy (HTB) scheme is available to individuals who sign a contract during the period 19 July 2016 and 31 December 2019.

- S. 477C(3) of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (Help to Buy) requires that an applicant “..entered into a contract with a qualifying contractor for the purchase by that individual of a qualifying residence...” in the “qualifying period”.

- S. 477C(1)(a) provides that “‘qualifying period’ means the period commencing on 19 July 2016 and ending on 31 December 2019;”.

I am advised by Revenue that the persons concerned signed their contract on 18 July 2016 and on that basis do not qualify for the scheme. While the persons concerned were advised accordingly by Revenue on 27 October 2017, the HTB is a self assessment scheme and unfortunately the claim was automatically processed and a tax repayment was transferred to the nominated bank account of the persons concerned on 1 November 2017. I am advised by Revenue that a letter has since issued advising the persons concerned that the repayment of tax received must be refunded to Revenue.

Garda Station Refurbishment

104. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason contracts have not been signed in relation to necessary upgrading works at Ballinasloe Garda station which were due to begin in October 2017; when these works are scheduled to commence in view of health and safety issues at the station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47170/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): It is expected that tender evaluation for the works for Ballinsloe Garda Station will be completed in the near future, following which a contract should be placed by the end of the year.

Ministerial Meetings

105. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason the meeting scheduled between his Department and representatives of various Departments with trade unions representing community employment supervisors was cancelled; when this meeting will be reconvened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47217/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In considering the particular matter regarding entitlements for community service supervisors, regard must be had to the costs and precedent of such an arrangement were one to be created. A scoping exercise is currently being finalised by officials in this Department and should be completed later this year. Due to unforeseen circumstances, it was necessary to postpone the meeting scheduled for 2nd November. A meeting of the Forum has been arranged to discuss the scoping exercise in the coming weeks.

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

Garda Station Closures

106. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the estimated cost of reopening a Garda station (details supplied) in Dublin 18; if plans for these refurbishments have been finalised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47238/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Stepside Garda is in the full ownership of the Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland. The station was closed on 14th March 2013 as part of the rationalisation programme of An Garda Síochána, as announced in the 2013 Policing Plan.

The Commissioners put a guardianship arrangement in place with Camelot in 2014. My officials have recently advised Camelot that, in accordance with the contractual agreement in place, a 25 day notice to vacate the premises will issue. This is subject to an assessment of when refurbishment works to facilitate the reopening of the Garda Station will begin.

A full brief of works will be required from An Garda Síochána in order to assess the cost of reopening the station at Stepside.

Flood Prevention Measures

107. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the contingencies in place to deal with increased water levels in rivers and waterways; the extra measures that have been established to deal with the upcoming winter months; the amount dedicated towards these contingencies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47239/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Responsibility for the overall management and co-ordination to local flooding events rests with the Local Authorities. The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government leads the national co-ordination during a severe weather event, including flooding.

The OPW carries out a statutory maintenance programme on 11,500 km of river channel and approximately 730 km of embankments nationally, on arterial drainage schemes completed by the OPW under the Arterial Drainage Acts 1945 and 1995.

The Government has invested €325m in major flood defence schemes since 1995 that are protecting approximately 8,500 properties with an estimated benefit to the country of damages avoided of over €1.5bn. The OPW continues to deliver on its existing programme of major flood relief schemes, and currently has ten schemes at construction and twenty-six at different stages of design or planning.

The €40m expended by the OPW's Minor Flood Works and Coastal Protection Scheme for 650 small scale local authority projects is providing flood protection to over 6,200 properties.

State Agencies continually monitor and, where possible, control river levels within their areas of responsibility, including on the Shannon. The Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Co-ordination Working Group established in 2016 is trialling the lowering of levels in Lough Allen to complement existing water level protocols in place for Lough Ree. It is also targeting maintenance works along the Shannon. These additional actions can help, in a small way, to manage flood risk.

The OPW's proactive flood risk planning, through the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme in the past number of years is nearing completion. I would hope by the end of this year to seek the approval from the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform for the 29 Flood Risk Management Plans developed under the CFRAM process. Thereafter I would hope to announce the proposed structural measures contained within those Plans that will, over the coming years, be taken to detailed design to protect those communities at assessed risk.

There are a range of other measures already in place to protect against a flood risk, including:

- planning guidelines promoting sustainable planning and development,
- improved national and local emergency flood response plans, and
- guidance to households and businesses on planning for a flood event. The Government's Be Winter Ready campaign is an important aspect of this initiative.

Brexit Issues

108. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which his Department has noted negative or positive impacts from Brexit; the steps required to address such issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47240/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): There is no doubt but that Brexit will pose significant challenges for Ireland. The Government is committed to addressing these challenges, to mitigating the impacts and to maximising the available opportunities.

Last May the Government published a document setting out in detail its approach and the structures it had put in place to ensure a strategic and whole-of-Government response.

Within my own Department a dedicated Brexit/EU/North South Unit is responsible for co-ordinating Brexit issues and for contributing to the whole-of Government response.

Across Government, work is continuing on addressing the challenges as well as the opportunities posed by Brexit. This builds on ongoing cross-Government research and analysis.

In addition, the Government is continuing to work with stakeholders, through the All-Island Civic Dialogue process and other stakeholder events.

State Properties Data

109. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the progress made in the implementation of the property asset management delivery plan; if a database has been compiled detailing all property owned by the State and local authorities; the number of properties that are classified as vacant; his plans for these vacant properties; if these properties are suitable for residential purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47241/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): *'Accommodating Change – Measuring Success'*, the Government's Property Asset Management Delivery Plan (the Delivery Plan), was published in July 2013. The key objective of the actions in the Plan was to "manage the Public Service property portfolio in a professional, co-ordinated and efficient manner that maximises value for money and facilitates business needs and service provision".

The Office of Public Works (OPW), with its Chairman as the Delivery Plan's *Senior Responsible Officer*, led the development of the Plan. A Steering Group comprising public property stakeholders was established to oversee progress on the delivery of the actions by across the participating State bodies.

Significant progress was made in the implementation of the Delivery Plan actions, as reported in the *Final Progress Report on the Public Service Reform Plan 2014-2016 (July 2017)*. The utility and further development of certain outputs, under many of the actions, is continuing after the designated Reform Plan timeframe.

One of those outputs that will require continued maintenance and development is the Intra-State Property Register. The Register currently has basic details on over 24,000 owned or leased properties by 94 individual organisations, including Central Government, Local Government, the HSE and Non-Commercial State organisations. These properties, in the main, are office and other buildings used by State organisations in the exercise of their functions. There are gaps in the data relating to individual properties. The register is a work-in-progress and efforts are continuing to improve the accuracy of the data on the Register and to fill the gaps where data is missing.

The Intra-State Register is one of a number of inter-linked outputs under the Delivery Plan that provide a platform for a more integrated and strategic management of the State's Property portfolio. The intention is that holders of State property assets should increasingly view property from a more strategic, State point of view rather than an individual or organisation viewpoint. When an organisation has a property for disposal, the first method of disposal to be considered is the transfer of the surplus property to another State organisation. The State Property Register facilitates this prioritised method of disposal by obliging State organisations with surplus property to identify it as such on the Register, and allow other State organisations a minimum of one month to express an interest. It is for this reason that the State Property Register records that a property is 'surplus to requirements' rather than 'vacant'.

I think that there is an important distinction between these two classifications, as 'surplus to requirements' indicates that the decision has been made to dispose, which is unlikely to match the number of properties that are vacant but not surplus to requirements. The Register does not record vacant properties.

It is important to note that while the OPW hosts the Register, the properties and the data are the responsibility of each of the 94 State organisations. Each organisation is responsible for the efficient management of those properties. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Circulars issued under the Delivery Plan outline the need for regular review of an organisation's property needs; and the use of appropriate appraisal processes for all decisions related to the acquisition, disposal and retention of property to ensure that the best use is made of State property assets to achieve value for money.

I understand that the Housing Delivery Office in the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government did undertake an exercise to identify those State and semi-State lands that were deemed surplus to requirements in urban areas where housing pressures are most acute. The exercise involved consultation with the various State and semi-State bodies including the OPW. The results of this exercise are on the Rebuilding Ireland website.

My officials in the OPW regularly review our own property portfolio to identify any properties that might be surplus. In the past year, a number of properties have transferred from the OPW to other State bodies to assist in alleviating homelessness.

Flood Prevention Measures

110. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the additional financial measures he will employ in 2018 to develop flood defences across the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47242/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): A total allocation of €101 million approximately for overall flood risk management has been provided in the 2018 Vote of the Office of Public Works (OPW) representing an increase of 35% on the equivalent 2017 Estimates allocation. This allocation primarily covers the costs of implementing flood defence capital works and the ongoing maintenance programme for completed Arterial Drainage Schemes. The 2018 total allocation includes a provision of €70m approximately for expenditure on flood defence works which is an increase of some €25m over the 2017 allocation. This significant increase is part of the commitment of €430 million for flood risk management under the Government's six year Capital Investment Plan 2016-2021 which will see the annual allocation for flood defence expenditure rise from €45m currently to €100million by 2021.

The 2018 allocation will allow the OPW to continue with its existing programme of major flood relief schemes which currently has ten schemes at construction with another 26 at different stages of design or planning. Over the next 12 months, the OPW hopes to commence the construction of another nine major schemes from this programme with a total value of over €230 million and these, along with the rest of the schemes in the programme will, when completed, provide flood protection to approximately 12,000 properties.

The 2018 allocation will allow for the continuation of the OPW's Minor Flood Works and Coastal Protection Scheme. This successful Scheme has allowed approximately 650 small scale local authority projects to be approved for funding at a cost of €40million, with completed projects to date providing flood protection to over 6,200 properties.

The OPW will also soon have completed its Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) studies which have been undertaken throughout the country over the last number of years and which have concentrated on the areas of most significant flood risk. It is expected that the resultant Flood Risk Management Plans will be published in the near future

once they have been approved by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. The Plans contain proposed flood defence works for approximately 140 additional areas at a projected cost of close to €600million and the projects arising from these Plans will start to be implemented on a prioritised basis from next year onwards.

Approximately 100 of these projects will be major schemes with the remainder falling into the minor works category which will enable the relevant Local Authorities to advance them reasonably quickly with funding being provided by the OPW.

Brexit Issues

111. Deputy Joan Burton asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the steps he will take to ensure that spending priorities are sufficiently focused in view of the threat to the economy of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47243/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The exact nature of the relationship that will exist between the EU and the UK following Brexit is yet to be agreed. The impact of Brexit on Ireland will depend on the outcome of the complex negotiations still underway. While this poses challenges in planning our response, it is important to note that Ireland's economy is in a strong position to deal with these challenges.

In recent years we have seen economic growth becoming more firmly established, and our public finances have remained on a sustainable path. As set out on Budget Day this year, 2018 will be the fourth successive year in which we will be able to increase expenditure on public services and infrastructure. The Government's priority is to protect and consolidate the progress that has been made to date. Consequently, it is important to maintain a focus not just on the level of expenditure, but also on how public funds are being spent. In this context the Spending Review process allows for the systematic examination of existing spending programmes to assess their effectiveness in meeting policy objectives.

On Budget day in October I announced an additional allocation of capital expenditure of €4.3 billion over the next four years, up to the end of our existing Capital Plan in 2021. This additional allocation is central to our response to Brexit and will allow our State and its agencies to properly plan major infrastructure projects over the medium term, while also ensuring communities and businesses can plan ahead. This additional funding has been allocated following the review of the Capital Plan, with this review providing an evidence base, reflecting sectoral gaps identified by robust analysis.

Supporting the areas of our economy that may be significantly impacted by Brexit will be a key element of the Government's response. To this end, as outlined in the Expenditure Report 2018, additional expenditure amounts have been specifically allocated to provide for Brexit related measures across a number of Departments including: the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation; the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport; and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Education, as well as delivering benefits for the individual and for society, is also vital to keeping our economy competitive and attracting investment in a post-Brexit world. Continued investment in education remains a priority of this Government. The allocation for Education in 2018 of over €10 billion represents a new peak for the sector and over 16½ per cent of total gross voted expenditure.

In addition to expenditure measures, there are also a number of whole-of-Government arrangements already in place as part of our response to Brexit, such as the Cabinet Committee

chaired by the Taoiseach. We are also strengthening our relevant Departments, Agencies and overseas missions to ensure that they have the necessary capacity, capabilities and expertise to address the issues that may arise as a result of the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

Labour Court Recommendations

112. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the progress on his Department's discussions with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection regarding the implementation of Labour Court recommendation, LRC 19293, regarding the rights of community employment scheme supervisors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47244/17]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In considering the particular matter referred to, regard must be had to the costs and precedent of such an arrangement were one to be created. A scoping exercise is currently being progressed by officials in this Department and should be completed later this year. A meeting of the Forum has been arranged to discuss the scoping exercise in the coming weeks.

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

National Botanic Gardens

113. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when funding will be provided to the National Botanic Gardens to carry out restoration works to the two historic greenhouses, the cactus house and the giant waterlily house, which are both listed buildings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47252/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Refurbishment of glasshouses is an objective of the Office of Public Works. However, bearing in mind the limited capital funding available and the necessity to prioritise expenditure of that funding, it is unlikely that the multi-million euro works will proceed in the short term. The Commissioners are open to proposals from the private sector and will be exploring options in this regard. In the meantime, research on and scoping of the necessary restoration works will be continuing.

National Botanic Gardens

114. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when funding will be provided to the National Botanic Gardens in order to increase its staffing levels in its scientific and horticultural teams which are at an acutely low level in terms of sustaining the gardens; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47253/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The National Botanic Gardens has housed the National Herbarium since 1970. In 2006 the staffing level of the Herbarium was raised from four employees to six. Unfortunately the moratorium on recruitment and promotion in the Civil Service has meant that of the 4 vacancies that occurred during this period none could be filled as they arose.

I can now advise the deputy the post of Taxonomist, who will act as the Keeper of the Herbarium, has recently been advertised and an appointment will be made as soon as possible. It is hoped to augment the staff compliment with further appointments over time.

Within the Horticultural staff we now have a complete team of 23 horticulturists.

Flood Prevention Measures

115. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if discretionary funding was allocated by the Office of Public Works to Clare County Council after Storm Darwin in 2014 for repair works to the embankments on the Shannon and Fergus estuaries for works to be carried out on private lands.; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47268/17]

116. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if discretionary funding was allocated by the Office of Public Works to Limerick city and county council after Storm Darwin in 2014 for repair works to the embankments on the Shannon estuary for works to be carried out.; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47269/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 115 and 116 together.

Following the severe storms of Winter 2013/2014 total funding of €9,712,385 was provided by the Office of Public Works (OPW) to Clare County Council for the repair of damaged coastal protection infrastructure including repairs along the Shannon and Fergus Estuary Embankments. I am advised by Clare County Council that works on the repair of the embankments in question have progressed at a number of locations in 2017 and that the remainder will be carried out in 2018 subject to planning and environmental considerations.

Limerick City and County Council did not seek funding from the OPW for repairs to the embankments in question.

Ministerial Meetings

117. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he has received a request to meet with a person (details supplied); if so, if he will meet with the person; and when the meeting will take place. [47171/17]

122. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will meet with a person (details supplied); if he has considered the requests made by the person on behalf of institutional abuse survivors; his plans to grant these requests; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47172/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am aware of the correspondence referred to by the Deputy and I have arranged to meet with the individual later this week.

Student Grant Scheme Appeals

118. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will

take to ensure that the SUSI appeals body expedites an appeal by a person (details supplied) who has appealed against a refusal to grant them the third level tuition fees sought in respect of their university course; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47220/17]

126. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he will take to have correspondence (details supplied) processed; if this matter can be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47219/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that the correspondence referred to in this instance was not previously received by my Department.

I understand that the student to which the Deputy refers, recently appealed the decision of the Appeals Officer of the awarding authority (SUSI) to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board (SGAB). The appeal will be heard within the 60 day timeframe set out in the Student Support Act 2011. The decision of the SGAB will be communicated directly to the student in due course.

Students in third-level institutions experiencing exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This Fund assists students, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Information on the fund is available through the Access Officer in the third level institution attended. This fund is administered on a confidential, discretionary basis.

Also, tax relief at the standard rate of tax may be claimed in respect of tuition fees paid for approved courses at approved colleges of higher education. Further information on this tax relief is available from the Revenue Commissioners at www.revenue.ie.

Schools Building Projects

119. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to facilitate an extension at a school (details supplied); if required funding can be facilitated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47154/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Deputy will be aware that a building project for the school in question is included in my Department's 6-Year Construction Programme (2019-2021). In this regard, my Department will be liaising with the school in due course in the context of initiating the preparatory work for the proposed project.

Special Educational Needs Staff

120. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the issues raised by a school (details supplied) in relation to the number of teachers provided to it; if an appeal from the school can be considered on the basis of the high number of enrolled students with special needs; if he will review the appeal criteria outlined in circular 0017/2017 and consider the inclusion of specific provision for the number of children with special needs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47156/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing

schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

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

The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit an appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board. Details of the criteria for appeal are contained in the staffing schedule, Circular 0017/2017.

Firhouse Educate Together National School submitted an application to the April and October meeting of the Appeals Board under three separate Criterion, Accommodation, Class Size and Developing. The Appeals Board determined that these appeals did not warrant the allocation of additional posts for the 2017/18 school year on confirmation of pupil enrolments on the 30th September 2017.

The Staffing Schedule also includes a separate provision where schools experiencing rapid increases in enrolment can apply for additional permanent mainstream posts on developing grounds. The school referred to by the Deputy was successful in being granted one additional post on developing grounds for the 2017/18 school year based on confirmed enrolments. The school has been notified accordingly.

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

In relation to the new model for the allocation of Special Education Teachers to schools, DES Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools were published on 7th March 2017.

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

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

Under the new allocation model, schools have been provided with a total allocation for special education needs support based on their school profile.

Included within this is an allocation for:

- A school educational profile component; which includes:
- An allocation for pupils with complex needs.
- The learning support needs in schools as evidenced by attainment levels in standardised test results.
- The social context of the school including disadvantage and gender.
- Baseline component provided to every mainstream school to support inclusion, prevention of learning difficulties and early intervention.

The provision of a profiled allocation is designed to give a fairer allocation for each school

which recognises that all schools need an allocation for special needs support, but which provides a graduated allocation which takes into account the actual level of need in each school.

The special education teaching allocation provided for this school for 2017/18 was 48.05 hours.

The profiling model had indicated a profiled special educational need for this school, relative to that of other schools, of 47.50 teaching hours.

However, as no school received an allocation, on the introduction of the new model, which was less than the allocation they received in the previous school year, the school maintained an allocation of 48.05 hours and it was indicated that within this allocation there was a retained element of 0.55 hrs.

Where a school profile significantly changes following the allocation process e.g. a developing school where the net enrolment numbers significantly increase year on year additional allocations may be made.

The criteria for qualification for mainstream school developing school posts are set out in DES Circular 17/2017 (Primary School Staffing Schedule) and DES 10,11,12/2017 (Post Primary School Staffing Schedule).

Schools who qualified for additional mainstream developing school posts in accordance with these criteria also qualified for additional Special Education Teaching Allocations to take account of this developing status.

Firhouse NS school was provided with an additional net SEN allocation of 2.45 hours on the grounds that the school qualified for one additional developing mainstream teaching post.

The school received a revised total special education teaching allocation of 50.5 hours.

This allocation equates to over 2 full time additional Special Education Teachers.

It is acknowledged and accepted that schools will have some additional pupils with special educational needs enrolling to their school subsequent to the profiles having been developed.

However, for the most part these will be balanced by the fact that some students who had additional teaching needs in the previous year will have left the school. The baseline is also designed to ensure that schools have some capacity to provide additional support to pupils.

The additional allocations made where schools qualify for developing mainstream teaching posts take account of growing enrolments.

It is also acknowledged that there will be some schools where exceptional circumstances may arise.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) will also be available to support schools where schools have developed and implemented appropriate plans for the deployment of their special education needs teaching resources, but the school considers that further support may be required. This support may involve Continuing Professional Development or further training for school staff, advice in relation to the support plans that are in place, and possibly a review process once schools can clearly demonstrate that exceptional circumstances have arisen in the school.

The NCSE has now published details of how schools can seek a review of their allocations, including the utilisation of their allocations, in circumstances where a school considers that

very exceptional circumstances have arisen subsequent to the development of the profile.

Should this school consider that they fulfil the criteria for a review on the grounds of exceptional circumstances, details of this review process are available at:

<http://ncse.ie/review-of-special-education-teacher-supports-where-there-are-exceptional-circumstances-or-needs-arising-in-a-school>.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

121. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason depreciation of interest on borrowings is taken as means rather than outgoings in the consideration of SUSI grant applications; if the applications for a grant for 2016 and 2017 in the name of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed in view of the fact that the family are suffering financial hardship having failed to qualify for the maximum grant support; if the actual financial circumstances of the family will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47162/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Student grant applications are means tested on gross income from all sources earned inside and outside the State within a specified reference period. The means test arrangements of the Student Grant Scheme are applied nationally. The assessment of income from the same starting point is deemed to be fair and reasonable because this approach eliminates any distortion which might arise from different spending decisions in different households. All earnings including overtime must be assessed for the calculation of reckonable income.

The Student Grant Scheme provides for higher income thresholds for larger families. In addition to this, further increases in the income thresholds are provided for where additional family members are attending further and/or higher education at the same time.

Students in third-level institutions experiencing exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This Fund assists students, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Information on the fund is available through the Access Officer in the third level institution attended. This fund is administered on a confidential, discretionary basis.

Also, tax relief at the standard rate of tax may be claimed in respect of tuition fees paid for approved courses at approved colleges of higher education. Further information on this tax relief is available from the Revenue Commissioners at www.revenue.ie.

Question No. 122 answered with Question No. 117.

Special Educational Needs Staff Contracts

123. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will examine the reduction in hours for a person (details supplied) at a school; if this reduction is a breach of contract; the reason this reduction has occurred when there has been no change in circumstances at the school; if the full-time hours will be reallocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47199/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The number of Special

Needs Assistants (SNAs) employed in a school depends on the allocation given to the school by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), based on its assessment of the special educational needs of pupils in the school. My Department has no control over the allocation process to schools and is not in a position to influence the allocation process in light of the fact that the NCSE is an independent statutory body. A school's allocation can increase or decrease and where schools receive a reduced allocation this can be for a variety of factors, such as pupils for whom the school had previously received an allocation have left, or have declining care needs. In light of this, the employment of SNAs may be reduced from full-time to part-time or may be terminated by way of redundancy where the approved allocation of the school is reduced.

Where a full-time SNA post within a school is reduced to a part-time post, the issue of redundancy payment in respect of the loss of hours may arise. Redundancy arrangements for SNAs are set out in Department Circular 0058/2006.

In addition, as per the provisions of the Supplementary Assignment Arrangements for SNAs which were established on foot of proposals brought forward by the Labour Relations Commission (LRC) when the Haddington Road Agreement was being agreed and which continue to operate under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018 - 2020, and both unions representing SNAs, namely SIPTU and IMPACT, have signed up to that agreement, where a school/ETB has an additional allocation of SNA hours/posts, then that additional allocation of hours/posts must be offered to any existing part-time SNAs in that employment, in order of seniority, before the employer has recourse to recruitment. These arrangements are set out in Department Circular 0042/2017 (which can be accessed via the link https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0042_2017.pdf).

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

In addition, and as announced as part of Budget 2018, funding is being allocated for the recruitment of over 1,090 new SNAs in 2018 (based on current forecasts), including some 130 posts which will be filled in the period between January and June next year, with the remainder being appointed from September 2018. This brings the total number of SNAs to over 15,000 (a 43% increase since 2011).

While reduced hours or redundancies will unavoidably occur in individual schools due to a variety of circumstances, these increases in SNA numbers coupled with the operation of the Supplementary Assignment Panel Arrangements make it more likely that SNAs can avoid redundancy and that part-time SNAs can gain or regain full-time employment.

Statutory Instruments

124. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline his plans to postpone the implementation of SI No. 394 of 2017, Education Support Centres (Appointment and Secondment of Directors) Regulations 2017, (Appendix A), until such time as this matter has been discussed by the Houses of the Oireachtas in view of the concerns raised by the various education centres throughout the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47201/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am aware of the concerns

raised by a number of Education Support Centres referred to by the Deputy. Section 37 of the Education Act 1998 provides the statutory basis for Education Support Centres and outlines the policy framework underpinning their recognition and functions, funding, staffing and governance. The Act empowers me as Minister to make regulations relating to the operation of centres including the appointment and remuneration of staff which includes the post of director.

The regulations I recently promulgated under Section 37(6) of the Education Act underpins my Department's policy for the secondment of teachers to Education Support Centres. These regulations comply with relevant legal and policy requirements. Accordingly, there are no plans to change the approach.

By way of background, my Department arranges for the secondment of teachers from their teaching posts for the purpose of developing and providing CPD for teachers and for the appointment as Directors of Education Support Centres (ESC's). Secondments are a temporary arrangement renewable on a year to year basis. While on secondment, teachers retain their school post, the terms and conditions that apply to teachers and receive their salary and a secondment allowance which are met in full by my Department.

In 2010, a new policy of secondment was introduced which included a new limit on secondment numbers and established an upper limit of 5 years on the length of a secondment, following which the Directors return to their posts either as a teacher or an inspector. The policy was agreed by the then Minister for Finance Mr Brian Lenihan T.D.

There are many benefits from the revised policy for teachers, their boards of management and the system as a whole. Because an upper limit of 5 years now applies to secondments, there is:

- confidence that the teachers involved in the delivery of CPD have recent experience of the curriculum and of the school environment
- certainty about secondment parameters which assist individual teachers and their boards of management in planning.

There are more opportunities for teachers to take on career enhancing roles in the support services and the Centres. Teachers returning to their school after a period of secondment have the potential to enrich their school environment and they become eligible to take on subsequent secondment opportunities after a period back in their school.

Regular turnover of seconded teachers is now an established practice with teachers returning to enrich their schools so the investment in their skills is not lost. Since 2010, 10 Education Centres have successfully recruited new Directors and the work of the Centres has not been negatively affected.

School Accommodation

125. Deputy Sean Fleming asked the Minister for Education and Skills when construction will commence on a school extension (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47211/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school referred to by the Deputy was approved a devolved grant under my Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme 2016 to provide 1 mainstream classroom, 1 resource room and 1 assisted user toilet.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that my Department recently gave approval to the school

authority for the project to proceed to Tender.

As this a devolved project, it is now a matter for the school authority to progress the project through this stage of the architectural planning process.

Question No. 126 answered with Question No. 118.

Third Level Scholarships

127. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a scholarship fund exists for Irish nationals accepted to study at a university (details supplied) for one year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47250/17]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The principal financial support provided by my Department for students in third level education is the student grant scheme. The scheme makes available means-tested financial assistance to qualifying full-time registered students in higher education attending approved courses in the EU, EEA and the Swiss Confederation.

My Department does not operate or administer any scholarship scheme which extends to third level studies outside of the EU. However, the student in question should check with his/her higher education institution to establish if there is any funding available through the institution towards such studies.

School Accommodation Provision

128. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the steps he has taken to replace two prefabs by the construction of a new building in the context of the school numbers at a school (details supplied); if funding will be provided to construct an additional classroom at the school in which prefabs have been in place for almost 12 years at this stage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47330/17]

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

Cross-Border Co-operation

129. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the Centre for Cross-Border Studies will receive its budgetary allocation under the temporary arrangement for budgetary allocations while the Northern Ireland Executive is not in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47160/17]

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government, through the Department of Education and Science, provides core funding to the Centre for Cross Border Studies (CCBS), amounting to €180,000 in 2016. Applications from the CCBS to my Department's Reconciliation Fund in 2015 led to the awarding of grants amounting to €60,000. CCBS next applied for funding to the Reconciliation Fund in the first funding round of 2017 and a grant of €8,400 was approved. It is regrettable and deeply concerning that, eight

months after the last Assembly election, a power-sharing Executive is not in place to make the necessary decisions, including on budgetary issues such as this one, for Northern Ireland. In accordance with the Government's role as a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement and the peace process, I continue to engage with and urge the parties to strive for the necessary agreement to allow the devolved institutions of the Agreement to operate again.

In the event that the devolved institutions cannot function, it is the responsibility of the British and Irish Governments to ensure that the North/South and East-West institutions of the Agreement can continue to operate effectively and in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the Agreement.

The CCBS, both through research and provision of advisory services, plays an important role in facilitating and strengthening the operation of North/South co-operation in areas of mutual interest and I have no difficulty urging financial and other support for their work. I will, in this context, raise the question of funding with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if this becomes necessary.

Garda Station Refurbishment

130. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to set out the estimated cost of reopening a Garda station (details supplied) in Dublin 1; if plans for these refurbishments have been finalised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47238/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. This includes identifying and progressing any necessary remedial or refurbishment works required at individual stations. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

The Deputy will be aware that the proposed reopening of Fitzgibbon Street Garda station is a key action recommended in the report on the North East Inner City prepared by Kieran Mulvey for the North East Inner City Ministerial Taskforce.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that they are working closely with the OPW to progress the project and that notices for Civil and Structural and Quantity Surveyor services have recently been placed on e-Tenders.

The exact cost of the project will be determined by the procurement process to be undertaken by OPW in due course and I am advised that funding is available in the capital envelope for Garda building projects.

Residency Permits

131. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to set out the expected residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47153/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a valid Deportation Order made on 19 February 2013. The Deputy might wish to note that persons the subject of a Deportation Order are obliged to remove themselves from the

State and to remain out of the State.

Representations were received on behalf of the person concerned requesting that the Deportation Order be revoked, pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 (11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). The Deputy might wish to note that any such decision will be to 'affirm' or to 'revoke' the existing Deportation Order. In the meantime, the Deportation Order remains valid and in place.

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

Garda Vetting Applications

132. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to set out the status of a person's (details supplied) Garda vetting application; and when the person can expect a decision. [47157/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have contacted the Deputy's office to request additional information in respect of the person who is the subject of his question in order to be in a position to make enquiries with the Garda Authorities. When the information has been provided, I will make the necessary enquiries regarding this vetting application and revert directly to the Deputy when they have been completed.

Garda Station Refurbishment

133. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to ensure the funding that has been allocated for the necessary upgrading of Ballinasloe Garda station is ring-fenced for 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47181/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is progressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. This includes identifying and progressing any necessary remedial or refurbishment works required at individual stations. As Minister, I have no direct role in these matters.

The Deputy will be aware of the significant efforts being made by Government to enhance the working environment generally for members of An Garda Síochána and of the major investment that has been committed under the Capital Plan 2016-2021 to upgrade Garda premises (including €18 million to support the Garda Station Building and Refurbishment Programme), the Garda fleet and Garda ICT infrastructure.

The Garda Station Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016-2021, which is an ambitious 5 year Programme that will benefit over thirty locations around the country, provides for refurbishment works to Ballinasloe Garda station, including a new public office and custody management facility. The Programme is based on agreed priorities established by An Garda Síochána and the Garda authorities are working in close cooperation with the OPW to deliver

the projects.

Departmental Expenditure

134. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality whether his Department officials ever dined in a restaurant (details supplied) with a member of An Garda Síochána senior management; if so, the amount it cost; the purpose of the dinner; the person or body that paid for it; the departmental or Garda budget line from which the expenditure came; his views on whether it was acceptable expenditure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47222/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I can inform the Deputy that no payment in respect of such an event has been identified in the records available (i.e., from 2010 to date).

Community Policing

135. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if management in An Garda Síochána is of the view that community policing in the greater Sligo urban area is operating sufficiently at present; the efforts being made to improve the level of service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47254/17]

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

I am informed by the Commissioner that the Garda strength of the Sligo/ Leitrim Division, on 30 September 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, was 297, 8 of which are community Gardaí. There are also 18 Garda Reserves and 28 civilians attached to the Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

The Deputy will be aware that the Government has, in its Programme for a Partnership Government, recognised the importance of community policing. It commits the Government to ensuring visible, effective and responsive policing in every community throughout the country in order to provide reassurance to citizens and prevent crime. This commitment is underlined by very significant investments in Garda resources.

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.

Furthermore, the Garda National Model of Community Policing plays a key part in responding to crime by taking into account and responding to local conditions and needs. Clear objectives are set, such as high visibility in the community, ease of contact by members of the public, and enhanced support for crime prevention strategies. All Gardaí have a role to play in Community Policing in carrying out their duties. In addition, the National Community Policing Office, attached to the Garda Community Relations Bureau, captures best practice in community policing initiatives and disseminates these practices through its communication network.

I am advised that Community policing continues to be a key aspect of the Garda approach to the prevention and detection of crime. Gardaí engage with a wide range of community based groups, as well in more formal settings such as Joint Policing Committees, to ensure that local issues can be aired and appropriate partnerships formed with communities to address matters of concern. Gardaí also support over 3,700 Community Alert and Neighbourhood Watch Schemes nationwide, and these form an important partnership with An Garda Síochána to prevent crime and protect communities, especially the elderly and more vulnerable persons. In addition, the Garda Text Alert Scheme provides an effective means for Gardaí to communicate crime prevention information to local communities.

The 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.

Budget 2018 will support the continuation of this high level of investment in the Garda workforce and ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. A further 800 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College, an additional 500 civilians will also be recruited to fill critical skills gaps across the organisation and to facilitate the redeployment of Gardaí from administrative and technical duties to front-line operational duties. In addition, there are plans to strengthen the Garda Reserve with new Reserves expected to commence training early in 2018.

In conclusion, all Garda activities, including community policing, will undoubtedly benefit from the resources now coming on stream through the Garda recruitment programme, and in particular the Government's commitment to increase Garda numbers so that An Garda Síochána has the capacity to address the needs of communities throughout the country and into the future.

To be of further assistance to the Deputy, I have requested a report on this matter from An Garda Síochána, and I will contact him again when I receive this report.

Naturalisation Applications

136. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to outline the progress to date in the determination of an application for naturalisation by a person (details supplied); when the application will be granted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47258/17]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is under consideration and has not yet reached a conclusion but I understand however, that the case is due to be submitted for decision in the near future.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State

but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

It is recognised that all applicants for citizenship would wish to have a decision on their application without delay. While most cases are now generally processed within six months, the nature of the naturalisation process is such that, for a broad range of reasons, some cases will take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks can take a considerable period of time.

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.

Built Heritage Investment Scheme

137. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if grants are available from her Department for a person to re-roof an old forge. [47215/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My role, as Minister, with regard to the protection and management of our built heritage is set out in the provisions of relevant legislation, as are the roles of local authorities and the responsibilities of owners as regards heritage assets.

Financial support is delivered by my Department for the protection of heritage buildings under structured schemes which are administered via the local authorities.

The Built Heritage Investment Scheme is a scheme for the repair and conservation of protected structures (i.e. structures on the local authority Record of Protected Structures). This year I approved €3.5 million in funding for approximately 500 projects across the country, creating employment in the conservation and construction industries, while helping to regenerate urban and rural areas.

The Structures at Risk Fund enables conservation works to heritage structures, in both private and public ownership, which are protected under the Planning and Development Acts and are deemed to be at significant risk of deterioration. This year I approved €1.324 million in funding for 67 projects nationally. This scheme seeks to encourage the regeneration and reuse of heritage properties and to help to secure the preservation of protected structures which might otherwise be lost.

In the context of a particular building, especially one which is on the Record of Protected Structures, the best advice for the owner may be to contact the Architectural Conservation Officer or Heritage Officer in their local authority who will be able to advise on the various types of funding available to assist with the building.

The Heritage Council, which my Department funds, also provides grants for the protection and preservation of the built heritage. It is primarily a matter for the Heritage Council to decide how its funding should be allocated across the range of research, education and conservation programmes it supports annually, having regard to competing priorities for limited resources. Grant schemes are advertised by the Heritage Council on its website www.heritagecouncil.ie.

National Monuments

138. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her attention has been drawn to the fact that Meath County Council is awaiting a response from the National Monuments Service regarding an archaeological impact assessment at the castle and tower house in Ashbourne, County Meath (details supplied); her plans to develop a new playground for the community that is being delayed as a result; if the response from the National Monuments Service will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47257/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department responded to the archaeological submissions in this case a number of weeks ago and is now awaiting receipt of additional particulars sought as part of that response. The case will be dealt with as quickly as possible once the additional information is received.

Hare Coursing Regulation

139. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her attention has been drawn to claims that a club (details supplied) held trials clandestinely on 24 September 2017; if she will investigate the matter; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47304/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): While it is my understanding that no trials were held at the club in question on 24 September 2017, there would have been no requirement in any case on the club to publicise such an event. Officials from the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department attended trials at the club on 23 September.

Hare Coursing Regulation

140. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to explain the reason rangers were not present to monitor a club (details supplied) meeting on 29 to 30 September 2017 in view of the number of hares that were struck, injured and killed at the trials the weekend before; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47305/17]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Officials of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department monitored the hare coursing meeting in question.

Services for People with Disabilities

141. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the length of the waiting times for school age team services and the lack of staffing in this area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47216/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and

plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Hospital Appointments Status

142. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a hospital appointment. [47158/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Stroke Care

143. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health to set out in tabular form the hospitals that can provide rehabilitation and early supported discharge of stroke sufferers; his views on whether there is an operational deficiency in some hospitals in this regard (details supplied); his plans to address this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47165/17]

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

Stroke Care

144. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health to set out in tabular form the number of stroke units; the number of beds per stroke unit; the number of dedicated medical staff per stroke unit by category of staff, that is, consultants, doctors and or nursing staff, by hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47167/17]

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

Home Care Packages Provision

145. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the status of a home care package application by a person (details supplied); if the application will be expedited in view of the person's impending discharge from Kerry University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47174/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): As this is a service

matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Health Services

146. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health the supports and services that are available to persons with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome to help them to manage their condition and ongoing care that is required; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47175/17]

147. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health if financial assistance is available to persons with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47177/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 146 and 147 together.

As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Treatment Abroad Scheme

148. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health if funding or part-funding will be provided for an upright MRI neuro imaging of the craniocervical junction and cervical spine in flexion and extension for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47176/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE operates the Treatment Abroad Scheme (TAS) for persons entitled to treatment in another EU/EEA Member State under EU Regulation (EC) No. 883/2004, as per the procedures set out in EU Regulations (EC) No. 987/2009. Patients apply to the HSE TAS seeking access to public healthcare outside the State through model form E112. Subject to the EU Regulations and Guidelines, the TAS provides for the cost of approved treatments in another EU/EEA member state through the issue of form E112 (IE) where the treatment is:

- Among the benefits provided for by Irish legislation;
- Not available in Ireland; and
- Not available within the time normally necessary for obtaining it in Ireland, taking account of the patient's current state of health and the probable course of the disease.

Applications to TAS are processed and a determination given in accordance with the statutory framework prior to a patient travelling to avail of treatment. The statutory framework stipulates the patient must be a public patient and is required to have followed public patient pathways. GPs refer patients to consultants for acute care and it is the treating consultant who, having exhausted all treatment options including tertiary care within the country, refers the patient abroad under the terms of the TAS. The consultant must specify the specific treatment and in making the referral accepts clinical responsibility in relation to the physician and facility abroad where the patient will attend.

Each application is reviewed individually and a decision is made in accordance with the legislation and guidelines and on the basis of a review by clinical experts. Each application is

given a formal written decision and where a decision is one of decline, the reason for that decision is clearly outlined and the option of an appeal is afforded. Previous approvals or declines are not used as an influencing factor on subsequent applications. The appeals process is outlined in each decline letter without exception. Where on appeal a decline decision is upheld, the appeal decision letter advises that the applicant can make a further appeal to the Office of the Ombudsman. Full details on the scheme can be found on the HSE website at www.hse.ie/treatmentabroadscheme.

The HSE has confirmed that no application has been received in relation to this individual.

Hospital Appointments Delays

149. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Health when an operation will be provided for a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay in issuing a date for this procedure; if the person can undergo the procedure on the National Treatment Purchase Fund or in another way; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47179/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, *A standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, January 2014*, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Services for People with Disabilities

150. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if consideration has or will be given to providing an allowance to polio survivors for physiotherapy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47185/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I am aware of the impact of the late effects of polio on survivors and I acknowledge the valuable work of the organisation, Polio Survivors Ireland, formerly the Post Polio Support Group, which was established nearly 25 years ago to provide support to polio survivors and their families. The organisation's awareness raising and information provision along with their support of polio survivors at work and in the home, is recognised as a vital support to survivors. In 2017, the organisation received funding in the region of €356,000 from the HSE under Section 39 of the Health Act, 2004, to support the work of the organisation.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) funds a range of health and personal social services and supports, incorporating hospital, primary care and community services, to enable each individual with a disability, including polio survivors, to achieve their full potential and maxi-

mise independence, including living as independently as possible. Services are accessed based on need and delivered in a variety of community and residential settings, in partnership with service users, their families and carers, and a range of statutory, non-statutory, voluntary and community groups.

My Department has no plans to introduce an allowance for polio survivors to access physiotherapy services. However, physiotherapy services form part of the services provided by many Primary Care Teams and, in particular, physiotherapists play a key role in chronic disease management, especially in instructing and guiding patients through safe and appropriate exercise regimes. Physiotherapy services for adults are also delivered through specialist disability providers. I have asked the Health Service Executive to provide the Deputy with details regarding the health and personal social services provided to polio survivors.

Health Services Funding

151. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be made available for children diagnosed with Irlen syndrome to offset the cost of assessment for and purchase of special lenses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47186/17]

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

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

152. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health the reason Crohn's disease is not covered under the long-term illness scheme; and the steps he is taking to address same. [47195/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The LTI Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The conditions covered by the LTI are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. Under the LTI Scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

There are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the Scheme.

Hospital Acquired Infections

153. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health the action he plans to take to combat the increased incidents of hospital acquired infections; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47200/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The prevention and control of healthcare associated infections (HCIs) and Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) has been a significant patient safety and public health priority for the Department of Health for numerous years. The Department supports the WHO Global Action Plan on AMR (2015) and the European Commission One Health Action Plan against Antimicrobial Resistance (June 2017).

A wide range of initiatives has been put in place in the Irish health system over several years

including improved surveillance of infections and prescribing, infection prevention and control processes, antimicrobial stewardship initiatives, public and professional awareness raising and with a significant emphasis on the education and training of healthcare professionals.

In response to the emergence of virulent antibiotic-resistant bacterial strains, in particular CPE or CRE, commonly known as ‘superbugs’, the HSE National Taskforce on HCAI AMR, established in late 2015, identified an urgent need to develop a comprehensive plan in response to the on-going and developing situation in relation to management of CPE within the health-care system. A national response team was established and a new National Clinical Lead for HCAI AMR was appointed to direct the work of the response team.

In addition, on the considered advice of the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) I activated the Public Health Emergency Plan on 25 October 2017 to further address CPE in our health system. The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) on CPE, chaired by the CMO, has been convened and had its first meeting on 2 November last. Membership of the team will include key stakeholders from the Department of Health, the Health Service Executive (HSE) management with responsibility for public health, surveillance, operations and quality assurance and patient representatives. NPHE will meet on a weekly basis and continually evaluate the readiness of the health service to manage and sustain the containment of CPE as part of ordinary operations with a view to standing down the National Public Health Emergency Team at the appropriate time. The National Public Health Emergency Team will direct and ensure an effective communications system at local, regional and national levels. Regular updates including summary minutes of meetings will be via a dedicated web page, hosted on the Department of Health website.

Ireland’s National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance 2017-2020 (iNAP) was launched on Wednesday, 25 October last. The Plan, jointly launched by myself as Minister for Health and Minister Michael Creed TD, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine has been a cross-Departmental initiative, requiring a cross sectorial and whole of Government approach to addressing the world wide threat of AMR.

iNAP was developed following the WHO Global Action Plan on AMR which required all countries to have in place a national action plan by mid-2017 and by the European Commission which also required Member States to develop a national action plan by mid-2017. The Plan has been prepared by both Government Departments, with the guidance of the National Inter-departmental AMR Consultative Committee. This ambitious 3-year Plan has been developed in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders and covers the use of antimicrobial medicines in animal health and agriculture, as well as human health - taking a ‘One Health’ approach to tackling AMR, encompassing all sectors. The Plan lists Strategic Interventions and Activities, responsible bodies and priority rankings of timelines for implementation. An implementation plan will be developed separately which will address means of tackling AMR as appropriate to each sector. The National Patient Safety Office (NPSO) will discuss arrangements for progressing this body of work with the HSE’s HCAI National Lead and relevant others; DAFM are establishing an AMR implementation plan team to oversee its body of work in addressing the interventions and activities listed proper to the agriculture and environment sectors.

iNAP aims to ensure the development and implementation of multifaceted interventions which will safeguard against inappropriate prescribing, dispensing and consumption of medicines, while simultaneously promoting rational use in patients and animals that are expected to benefit from treatment.

Ireland is fully committed to and engaged in addressing resolution of the problem of AMR and will continue to collaborate at national, European and International levels to this end.

Stroke Care

154. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health the status of stroke unit services available in Dundalk and Drogheda, County Louth, due to the higher volumes of stroke patients in these areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47212/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): In response to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Procedures

155. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when transvaginal mesh (details supplied) was first used by the HSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47236/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): This matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy. If the Deputy has not received a reply from the HSE within 10 working days, I ask her to contact my Private Office and it will follow up with the HSE.

Hospital Services

156. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the reason 20 persons in Our Lady's Hospital, Navan, County Meath, (details supplied) are clinically discharged but due to blocked treatment pathways are prevented from proceeding to the next step of their treatment. [47247/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

157. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47248/17]

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 is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider the patient's condition warrants and earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital

involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Emergency Departments

158. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of a request by Letterkenny University Hospital to reopen its short-stay ward and 20 beds to alleviate the pressure on the accident and emergency department at the hospital; if the hospital's related request for additional staff to operate the ward will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47249/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to contact you with regard to the project.

Services for People with Disabilities

159. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons accessing services at a centre (details supplied); the range of services provided; his plans to extend such services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47266/17]

160. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health his plans to upgrade or replace existing inadequate accommodation at a centre (details supplied); the timeframe for the provision of modern and appropriate accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47267/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 159 and 160 together.

The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's questions relate to service matters, I have arranged for the questions to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

161. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health his plans to consider funding the drug Kuvan for persons suffering from phenylketonuria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47270/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the community drug schemes, in accordance with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

In reaching a decision, the HSE examines all the evidence which may be relevant in its view for the decision and will take into account such expert opinions and recommendations which

may have been sought by the HSE, including, for example, advice from the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE).

Sapropterin (Kuvan) was previously considered under the national pricing and reimbursement processes in 2009. At that time, insufficient evidence was available to support the pricing and reimbursement application submitted by Merck Serono.

In December 2015, Merck Serono advised the HSE that the market authorisation for sapropterin was transferring to Biomarin in 2016. The HSE met with the new market authorisation holder in May 2016 and was advised that it would be submitting a health technology assessment dossier in relation to sapropterin.

The NCPE assessment of the new dossier was completed on the 15 September 2017 and the NCPE did not recommend sapropterin for reimbursement as it was not deemed cost effective.

The HSE assessment process is ongoing and the HSE will take into account any relevant expert advice when making its decision, in line with the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013.

Hospital Waiting Lists

162. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be allocated a date for surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47272/17]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Eating Disorders

163. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of young children and teenagers currently being treated for anorexia as inpatients in paediatric hospitals. [47296/17]

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.

Eating Disorders

164. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of young children and teenagers being treated for anorexia as inpatients in adult mental health units. [47297/17]

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.

Eating Disorders

165. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of young children and teenagers being treated abroad in specialist eating disorder units, for example, in the UK. [47298/17]

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

Health Services

166. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health if all the beds in HSE units (details supplied) are fully utilised; and if not, if some are lying empty due to staff shortages. [47299/17]

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.

Eating Disorders

167. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of young children and teenagers who have died in the past five years as a result of eating disorders. [47300/17]

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

Mental Health Services Data

168. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the number of child and adolescent mental health services, CAMHS, units that have staff with specialist eating disorder experience. [47301/17]

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

Mental Health Services Staff

169. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the optimum specialist staff numbers for the 20-bed unit in the planned new children's hospital, of which eight will be dedicated for eating disorder patients. [47302/17]

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

Health Strategies

170. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding each of the sexual health strategy's priority actions, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47315/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): As this is a service matter, it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Single Payment Scheme

171. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the single farm payments entitlements that have been transferred from a person (details supplied) to another person; and if payments due to the person will be made. [47163/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted two applications to my Department for 2017 Transfer of Entitlements. One application has been finalised and the other will be finalised shortly. The persons named will be notified as soon as the transfer applications are finalised and any payment due will issue shortly thereafter.

European Fisheries Fund

172. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the amount of grant aid provided through the European maritime fisheries fund programme or its equivalent programme in each of the years 2009 to date in 2017 to the fisheries sector here, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47225/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested by the deputy, in relation to the seafood sector as a whole, is set out in the tables below. The Seafood Development Programme, co-funded by the Exchequer and European Fisheries Fund, operated from 2008 to 2015, while the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) Operational Programme has provided grant aid since 2014.

Figures for 2017 will not be available until 2018.

EFF Programme	2009 - €	2010 - €	2011 - €	2012 - €	2013 - €	2014 - €	2015 - €	Total
	15,605,028	85,322	597,020	4,360,332	3,445,767	4,857,770	13,657,028	42,608,267
EMFF Programme	2014 - €		2015 - €		2016 - €		Total	
	5,873,241		7,358,077		17,624,092		30,855,410	

Fishing Vessel Licences

173. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to introduce by statutory instrument a penalty points system for fishing vessel licence holders; the way in which the penalty points system will operate; the rights of appeal he plans to introduce for the vessel licence holders; and the timeframe for the introduction of the statutory instrument. [47255/17]

174. Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the level of consultation he has had with the fishing sector over the past four months over the proposed introduction by statutory instrument of a penalty points system for vessel licence holders; the other organisations and groups he has consulted with on this issue for the same period; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47256/17]

176. Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the definition of serious infringements as contained in his written correspondence of 1 November 2017 to the members of the Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine regarding the points system for fishing vessel licence holders; the way in which he plans to deal with the definition and future interpretation of serious infringement; the person or body that will make such a determination and interpretation of the statutory instrument once introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47276/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 173, 174 and 176 together.

The European Union (Common Fisheries Policy) (Point System) Regulations 2016 (S.I. No. 125 of 2016) establishes a point system, which will apply to the Licence Holder of a sea-fishing boat when a serious infringement of the Common Fisheries Policy is detected. It is intended that the new Statutory instrument which I intend to sign shortly will replace S.I. No. 125 of 2016 to change the make-up of the Determination Panel set up under the 2016 S.I. to determine if on the balance of probabilities a serious infringement occurred and whether it is a serious infringement. This will involve the appointment of three independent legal professionals nominated by the Attorney General, thereby completely separating the enforcement and the determination functions. The new SI will, to the extent possible, take on board the issues of concern in relation to procedures and processes highlighted in High Court judgments on this matter. It will also address certain minor technical and drafting issues arising in S.I. No. 125 of 2016.

In June 2016, I advised the Oireachtas that subject to addressing some important legal and administrative issues, that I was hopeful of moving towards a system of sequential application of EU points in conjunction with the prosecution process, having consulted with the Attorney General's office. I made it clear that this move was subject to addressing some important legal and administrative issues in order to ensure compliance with EU law.

There has been extensive examination and consideration of all the issues in relation to meeting our EU obligations to implement the points system in the interim period. The firm legal view available to me is that it is not possible to deliver on an effective and dissuasive points system, as required under EU law, by assigning points to licence holders upon successful prosecution.

In relation to stakeholder consultation, I discussed with industry representatives my plans to bring forward a new SI at the Sea Fisheries Liaison Group meeting on 20 October 2017 and explained the amendments I am planning and the justification for these amendments.

Under the new S.I., the licence holder may appeal on a point of law a decision of the independent fisheries Adjudicator to the High Court. In the 2014 S.I. (which was struck down by the Courts and replaced by the 2016 SI), this appeal was "final and conclusive" – this aspect of the provision has been removed.

It should be noted in this context that Pilot Infringement proceedings by the EU Commission for non-implementation of the EU points system have been taken against Ireland. It remains an option for the EU Commission to proceed to formal infringement proceedings in respect of the licence holders system.

There are also serious implications with regard to the release of funding under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). Implementation of the EU Points system was an ex-ante conditionality for the approval of Ireland's European Maritime Fisheries Fund Programme, given that the programme is intended to facilitate implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy in Ireland. The EU Commission has signalled in writing that the delivery of funding under Ireland's EMFF Operational Programme is firmly linked to the implementation of the points system. This programme is investing €241m of EU/Exchequer funding in total in the fisheries sector over the lifetime of the programme, which is crucial at a time of Brexit uncertainty. The immediate concern is with regard to the control and data collection funds. The EU Commission wrote in July 2017 advising that due to the non implementation of the Points system, EMFF funding allocated for control spend will be suspended.

Regarding the determination of a serious infringements, the S.I. (Regulation 3 of SI No. 125 of 2016) defines "serious infringement" as "...an infringement of the rules of the common fisheries policy mentioned in Annex XXX to the Commission Regulation that is determined by the Determination Panel, on the balance of probabilities, to be serious having regard to the criteria and guidance notes referred to in Regulation 6(3)."

Regulation 3 also provides that "Commission Regulation" means Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No. 404/2011 of 8 April 2011 as amended by Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2015/1962 of 28 October 2015.

Regulation 6(3) referred to above provides that "The SFPA may issue guidance notes, which shall be published on its website on the internet, for the purpose of providing practical guidance in identifying the criteria, for the purpose of these Regulations, the Control Regulation and the Commission Regulation, employed in determining whether an infringement is a serious infringement."

It is intended that the new SI will feature the same definitions. As stated above, it is envisaged that it will be for the new Determination Panel established under the new SI to determine if on the balance of probabilities a serious infringement occurred and whether it is a serious infringement.

Having an effective, proportionate and dissuasive system of points for all fishing vessels, Irish and non Irish, operating in our 200 mile zone is beneficial to maintaining the sustainability of fish stocks on which our seafood sector is dependant. This system will ensure that the vast majority of our law abiding fishermen are able to compete effectively and look forward to a sustainable future in the industry.

Fodder Crisis

175. Deputy Brendan Smith asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures being put in place in view of the concerns, particularly in the north west, about a possible fodder shortage in early 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47271/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department has been closely monitoring weather conditions, grass growth and feed supplies. It is clear that the weather conditions over the past number of weeks has been challenging and this has created difficulties for farmers in parts of the country, particularly in the Western and North Western regions.

Grass growth rates through September and October were ahead of recent years. Data from Pasturebase Ireland indicates that production is running about 1 tonne dry matter per hect-

are ahead of last year. Notwithstanding this, grazing conditions did deteriorate from mid August on farms in the Western regions and on heavier land. This has given farmers a number of challenging weeks managing livestock with animals having to be temporarily housed and difficulties with securing later cut silage. I note that there appears to be reasonable supplies of feed and fodder available across the country at present. However, I have asked Teagasc to work locally in areas with fodder difficulties, to support the need for good budgeting of fodder supplies on farms for the winter ahead and into 2018.

The European Commission agreed to my request for an advance payment of the 2017 Basic Payment Scheme. This has been prompted by the protracted inclement weather conditions and also market difficulties caused by currency fluctuations. This means an increase from 50% to 70% in the advance payment rate for the BPS to those applicants whose applications were confirmed fully clear. These payments were recently issued, and balancing payments will be made with effect from early December. There will also be an increase permitted to the advance for Pillar II Rural Development schemes.

These payments and the payments under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme, are injecting up to €800 million into the Irish rural economy and will provide a very welcome boost for Irish farm families, and also funding for fodder and feed purchase where required.

Taking account of this, there are no plans at this time to establish a fodder aid scheme. My Department will continue to closely monitor the situation.

Question No. 176 answered with Question No. 173.

Agriculture Scheme Payments

177. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he expects all agricultural support payments to be made on time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47279/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department administers a wide range of schemes which provide vital support to underpin the continued sustainability and growth of the agrifood sector. I am very aware of the importance of these supports for farmers, and accordingly the issuing of payments under these schemes is a matter of priority for my Department.

The main schemes are delivered under the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, and each year approximately €1.5bn issues under these schemes. My Department has a strong record in the efficient delivery of these payments, as evidenced by the fact that we perform very favourably compared to other EU Member States in terms of both the dates on which payments are delivered and our ability to maximise the drawdown of available EU funding.

In terms of the individual schemes, the main Direct Payment scheme is the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS). Advance payments commenced on 16 October this year, which is the first date permissible under the EU Regulations. In all, an advance payment worth some €700 million issued to 111,000 farmers on the first pay run, representing an increase from the 109,000 farmers paid at the same stage in 2016.

The Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) Scheme commenced payment on schedule again this year. In the week beginning 18th September, payments in excess of €160 million issued to over 75,000 farmers, representing a significant increase over the 65,000 paid at the same stage in 2016.

In both the BPS and ANC schemes, payments have continued to issue as additional cases have become clear for payment and the current position with those schemes is that for BPS 116,500 applicants have now been paid €755 million and for ANC over 86,600 applicants have been paid €186 million.

With regard to GLAS, all applications must pass regulatory controls and validations before payment can issue. Payments are due to commence issuing to applicants in the coming weeks. I do not expect any payment delays where everything in the application is found to be in order.

The TAMS II Scheme has been very successful to date in terms of uptake with the number of approvals that have issued to date exceeding 11,600. All of these approvals represent committed expenditure under the TAMS II measure of the Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020.

Of the applications approved just over 2,500 payment claims have been received to date, representing 21% of approvals. Payment claims submitted have been paid in over 75% of cases and these continue to be paid on an on- going basis. However, until such time as the works applied for and approved have been completed and payment claims submitted, payments cannot issue.

All participants who have completed approved works are urged to submit their payment claims immediately to facilitate early payment.

Organic Farm Scheme payments in 2015 and 2016 amounted to €8m each year. Projected expenditure for 2017 is €13m and the average payment is approximately €6,500. It is expected that 2016 balancing payments will issue this month.

Payments have now commenced on the Knowledge Transfer Programme. The initial payment runs relate to cases where all Year 1 requirements have been fully met by the farmer – cases where all requirements have been only partially met or where inspections are ongoing will follow shortly. Given the structure of the scheme, farmer payments are now rolling out on a sector by sector basis as follows:

SECTOR And PAYEE
KT Sheep – farmer payment - Payment issued
KT Beef – farmer payment - Payment issued
KT Dairy – farmer payment November 2017
KT Tillage – farmer payment November 2017
KT Equine – farmer payment November 2017
KT Poultry – farmer participant November 2017

In addition to the above schemes, advance payments at a rate of 85% are due to issue later this month to participants in the new Sheep Welfare Scheme.

In relation to all these EU funded schemes, it is important to note that EU regulations stipulate that payments can only issue when the required validation checks have been carried out and passed. I am very anxious to ensure that my Department continues to issue these important payments to farmers in the most efficient and timely manner possible, and this remains a key priority for me.

Beef Imports

178. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the degree to which beef or other meat imports from third countries have been evaluated with particular reference their impact on Irish and EU producers; if steps are being taken to safeguard Irish and EU agrifood producers in view of current or potential imports from third countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47280/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Ireland has a small open economy and relies to a significant extent on international trade for its economic well-being. This is particularly true in the agrifood sector, given its overwhelming dependence on export trade. Against this background, Ireland is broadly supportive of balanced trade liberalisation, provided our most vulnerable sectors, including beef, are protected.

Where agri food products are imported from third countries, such imports are governed by a comprehensive and robust legislative framework laid down at EU level, controlled by Member States in the first instance, and audited by the European Commission's Directorate General for Health and Food Safety (formally the FVO), to ensure compliance with all of the relevant food safety standards. The legislation imposes health and supervisory requirements designed to ensure that imported products meet standards equivalent to those required for production and trade between Member States. Import control procedures on products of animal and fish origin are highly prescriptive and strictly audited by the Directorate to ensure compliance. Inspection finding reports are published on the Directorate General for Health and Food Safety's website. Veterinary checks are carried out on consignments of foods imported from Third countries outside the EU. Consignments are subject to documentary, identity and physical checks, including sampling of products, carried out in accordance with European regulations at Border Inspection Posts.

Any evaluation of future trade deals should take account of the EU Commission's assessment of the cumulative impact on the agri food sector, and of the potentially negative impact of Brexit on EU agriculture. In the context of discussions on a potential trade deal with Mercosur, I have worked with a number of other member states to mobilise opposition to the inclusion by the Commission of a beef tariff rate quota in its recent offer to Mercosur countries, and in this context will continue to ensure that the interests of Irish beef farmers are protected.

Agrifood Sector

179. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he is satisfied that standards in the agrifood sector relating to husbandry, production, processing and traceability as applicable throughout the EU will not be compromised by imports from third countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47281/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Food products placed on the marketplace are covered by a range of legislation designed to ensure that products supplied to consumers are of the highest safety standards. My Department plays a part in the enforcement of this legislation along with other Government Departments and State Agencies such as the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI), the Health Service Executive, and Local Authority Veterinary Inspectorate, Marine Institute and the Sea Fisheries Protection Agency. The FSAI is the body responsible for enforcement of regulations governing traceability, labelling and provision of food information to customers.

Primary responsibility under EU law for the safety and traceability of food placed on the market lies with food business operators. The role of National Competent Agencies is to verify compliance with this requirement. This is done via a combination of inspecting establish-

ments and auditing the food safety management systems which operators have in place. These controls are applied at different stages in the food supply chain. Regulation (EC) No. 178 of 2002 sets out the general principles and requirements of EU food law and stipulates that food business operators must, at all stages of production, processing and distribution within their business, ensure food law requirements are satisfied. In regard to traceability, the regulations require that food business operators have what is referred to as the ‘one step forward, one step backward’ traceability system. There are additional requirements for certain fishery and aquaculture products under the Control Regulation (Regulation 1224/2009 and Implementing Regulation 404/2011) from first sale to subsequent stages of production, processing and distribution up to retail.

My Department has a permanent veterinary presence at all its approved slaughter plants. Controls at plants only engaged in secondary processing are carried out at a frequency based on an annual risk assessment. An annual audit of imported products is carried out in each Department-approved plant, including checks on physical identity, labelling and documentary checks.

Extra veterinary checks are carried out on selected consignments of foods imported into DAFM-approved establishments from other EU Member States or from Third Countries outside the EU. These checks include physical checks of product condition, checks of accompanying documentation and checks of labelling and health markings.

The import of products of animal origin from third countries is governed by a comprehensive and robust legislative framework laid down at EU level, controlled by Member States in the first instance, and audited by the European Commission’s Directorate General for Health and Food Safety, to ensure compliance with all of the relevant food safety standards. The legislation imposes health and supervisory requirements designed to ensure that imported products meet standards equivalent to those required for production and trade between Member States. Border Inspection Posts are operated by my Department. Import control procedures on products of animal and fish origin are highly prescriptive and strictly audited by the Directorate to ensure compliance. Inspection finding reports are published on the Directorate General for Health and Food Safety’s website.

I am satisfied that the controls and checks in place and enforced by my Department ensure that European consumers are protected and correctly informed when they purchase and consume food products.

Brexit Issues

180. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which the future of families depending on the fishing industry will not be jeopardised, post Brexit, and that adequate arrangements are in place to ensure that the fishing sector here remains in a good position to develop now and in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47282/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): As I have stated before, fisheries is, and will remain, a high priority for Ireland in the Brexit negotiations. I am determined to ensure that fisheries remain high on the Brexit agenda in the EU and that the interests of Ireland’s fishing communities are fully protected.

A key element in protecting the interests of our fishing industry will be ensuring that fisheries does not become isolated from the wider negotiations. I am glad to say that Michel Barnier and the relevant Member States are as determined as Ireland in that regard.

Existing access arrangements and percentage shares of fish stocks have been agreed by all EU Member States, including the UK, over many years and were most recently affirmed in 2014 when the current Common Fisheries Policy came into force. I see no basis whatsoever for the kind of reordering of the current arrangements apparently sought by some in the UK.

I will be meeting UK Secretary of State Gove at the end of this month and I will be setting out our position.

My position is absolutely clear – I will not accept any change in the current access and sharing arrangements to the detriment of Ireland's and the EU's fishing communities.

We would all like higher quotas but the way to achieve that is to grow the stocks through sustainable management for the benefit of all.

If and when the UK finally leaves the EU they should equally retain their current shares and entitlements. We are not asking that they lose their rights of access to EU waters or face any reductions in their current shares and see no reason why we should lose ours.

As the Deputy will be aware, there has been an enormous amount of work on this issue in terms of analysing potential impacts for our fishing industries under the various possible scenarios since well before the UK referendum. This work has been carried out by my Department, the Marine Institute and BIM in close cooperation with the fishing industry.

At EU level there have been, and will continue to be, regular contacts with the Barnier Task Force, Fisheries Commissioner Vella and like-minded Member States at all levels. In all of these contacts I have stressed the importance of a unified EU front and our determination to maintain all of our current rights. This is a view shared by all of those Member States that have rights in the UK zone.

In conclusion, I would like to assure the Deputy that I aim to ensure that fisheries are inextricably linked to overall discussions on the totality of the future relationship between the EU and the UK. I will be unequivocal in opposing any dilution of our existing EU quota shares, including protecting the benefit to Ireland of the Hague Preferences, and any limitations on our existing rights of access.

Fishing Industry

181. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to outline the growth and development of the fish processing sector, including landings, over the past ten years; the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the future development of the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47283/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In 2016, there were 156 seafood processing enterprises providing close to 4,000 jobs in peripheral coastal communities. Some 24 of these enterprises (16%) had revenues over €10 million, 52 (33%) had revenues between €1 million and €10 million and 80 (51%) had revenues of less than €1 million. The growth and increasing scale of the processing sector can be seen when comparing this to 1999, when only 11 enterprises had revenues of over £5 million, 8 had revenues of between £3 - £5 million, and 6 enterprises had revenues of between £1 - £3 million.

Our seafood sector (domestic and export) was valued at €945 million in 2016. This figure represents a 33% increase from a value of €712 million in 2010. The value of our seafood exports increased by 47%, or €180 million, to €559 million in the same period. Underpinning this

growth is the value-add of seafood, which has seen the average unit price of seafood exports increase from €1.67 to €2.71 over the period from 2010 to 2016.

To assist our seafood processing sector in achieving its growth potential in the years ahead, and informed by Food Wise 2025, the Government is focussed on encouraging the sector to add value to fish raw material through increased innovation and development of new consumer products, encouraging the sector to further enhance its scale to make it more competitive on world markets, and encouraging the development and diversification of our export markets. My Department's European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Operational Programme is providing the development funding for these objectives and Bord Iascaigh Mhara is delivering those EMFF supports through the Seafood Innovation, Seafood Scaling and Seafood Capital Investment Schemes, while Bord Bia is significantly expanding its seafood promotion programme.

Food Safety Standards

182. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he is satisfied that the European Union in general continues to uphold the highest quality, hygiene and health standards in the food sector and that imports from third countries do not undermine such standards to the detriment of European food producers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47284/17]

184. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which the agrifood sector here has been or is likely to be threatened by imports into the EU from third countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47286/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 182 and 184 together.

Food products placed on the European marketplace are covered by a range of legislation designed to ensure that products supplied to consumers are of the highest safety standards. My Department plays a part in the enforcement of this legislation along with Competent Authorities in other Member States, other Irish Government departments and State Agencies such as the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) and the Health Service Executive.

The importation of products of animal origin from third countries is governed by a comprehensive and robust legislative framework laid down at EU level, controlled by Member States in the first instance, and audited by the European Commission's Directorate General for Health and Food Safety (formally the FVO), to ensure compliance with all of the relevant food safety standards. The legislation imposes health and supervisory requirements designed to ensure that imported products meet standards equivalent to those required for production and trade between Member States. Border Inspection Posts are operated by my Department. Import control procedures on products of animal and fish origin are highly prescriptive and strictly audited by the Directorate to ensure compliance. Inspection finding reports are published on the Directorate General for Health and Food Safety's website. Veterinary checks are carried out on consignments of foods imported from Third countries. Consignments are subject to documentary, identity and physical checks, including sampling of products, carried out in accordance with European regulations.

Primary responsibility under EU law for the safety and traceability of food placed on the market lies with food business operators. The role of National Competent Agencies is to verify compliance with this requirement. This is done via a combination of inspecting establishments and auditing the food safety management systems which operators have in place. These

controls are applied at different stages in the food supply chain. Regulation (EC) No. 178 of 2002 sets out the general principles and requirements of EU food law and stipulates that food business operators must, at all stages of production, processing and distribution within their business, ensure food law requirements are satisfied.

I am satisfied that the controls and checks in place and enforced by my Department ensure that European standards are not detrimentally affected by imports from third countries.

Agriculture Industry

183. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he has had discussions with the farming sector with a view to identifying issues that have caused concern in the course of the past 12 months; if particular provisions are likely to be made to address these issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47285/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I engage with representatives of the farming organisations on a very regular basis and my Department engages closely with them virtually daily, on a range of policy and practical issues.

These include the impact of Brexit on the agri food sector, the impact of international trade agreements including Mercosur, the shape of the CAP post 2020, and a wide range of sectorial issues.

In shaping policy responses I have regard to the views of stakeholders, and also to a variety of other factors, including the constraints of the relevant legal framework, the available economic analysis, the funding available and value for money considerations.

For example the shape of schemes available under the €4 billion Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 is generally the product of consultation with farm and other representative bodies, but also subject to a comprehensive EU legal framework and approval by the European Commission.

In relation to Brexit, I have established a Consultative Committee of Stakeholders in order to ensure a full exchange of information on the potential implications of a UK exit from the EU for the agrifood sector in Ireland. I convened the first formal meeting of the Committee on 7 July 2016 and I have held three subsequent meetings.

In the 2017 Budget I provided seed funding for a €150m loan scheme for primary producers and in the 2018 Budget I am supporting new €300m loan scheme for SMEs, at least 40% of which will be made available to food businesses. I have also secured funding of €25 million for 2018 to allow my Department develop a low cost loan scheme for farmers, fishermen and food businesses similar to the 2017 scheme.

I have also provided an additional €14m for Bord Bia since the end of 2016 and my department has intensified its efforts, including through a programme of trade missions, to ensure that Irish food products have access to as many international markets as possible.

In relation to Mercosur, I have been very active in highlighting the potentially very damaging impact of a bad deal on the European beef sector. At political level, I have raised the issue with Member State colleagues and with Commissioners Hogan and Malmström, and within the Council of Agriculture Ministers as recently as yesterday, and the Taoiseach has raised the matter with Presidents Macron and Juncker.

On CAP, Ireland will continue to argue for a strong budget and continued commitment to the provision of support for family farms.

I wish to assure the House that I will continue to engage closely with stakeholders, including farm bodies, and remain focused on supporting the agrifood industry through the challenges ahead.

Question No. 184 answered with Question No. 182.

Agrifood Sector

185. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which the targets set in Food Harvest 2020 and Foodwise 2025 continue to be met; the areas which have raised concern; the proposals arising therefrom; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47287/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The main targets set out in the Food Harvest report published in 2010 were, by 2020, to increase the value of primary output by 33% and agrifood exports by 40% (both from a 2007-09 average baseline); and to increase value added production by 40% (from a 2008 baseline). In addition to these value increases, a target was set for a 50% increase in milk production by 2020, to be progressed following the abolition of milk quotas in April 2015. Progress on those targets is monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis. The latest data available show growth of 36% for both primary production and exports (based on 2016 data), and 47% for value added (latest available data 2014), versus the baseline period, demonstrating excellent progress.

Food Wise 2025, the latest ten year strategy for the agrifood sector published in July 2015, is the successor to the Food Harvest strategy. It identifies the opportunities and challenges facing the sector and provides an enabling strategy that will allow the sector to grow and prosper. Food Wise includes more than 400 specific recommendations, spread across the cross-cutting themes of sustainability, innovation, human capital, market development and competitiveness; as well as specific sectorial recommendations.

If these recommendations are implemented, the expert committee, which drew up the Food Wise 2025 Strategy, believes that the following growth projections are achievable by 2025: increasing the value of agrifood exports by 85% to €19 billion; increasing value added in the sector by 70% to in excess of €13 billion; and increasing the value of primary production by 65% to almost €10 billion. With regard to employment, Food Wise foresees the creation of 23,000 additional jobs in the agrifood sector all along the supply chain from primary production to high value added product development.

In July this year, I launched the second annual progress report of Food Wise 2025: Steps to Success 2017. This showed that, of the 368 detailed actions which were due to commence by 2017 or are on-going actions; 46% have been achieved or substantial action has been undertaken; and a further 49% have commenced and are progressing well.

I will host a Food Wise Conference in Croke Park on 4th December which will acknowledge the achievements of the Irish agrifood sector in terms of innovative, sustainable growth over recent years; and consider how the Food Wise process can lead a dynamic, collaborative response to future opportunities and challenges.

Dairy Sector

186. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the degree to which growth in the dairy sector can continue; the extent to which new markets are being identified and or are identifiable; the progress in relation to such markets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47288/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Deputy will be aware that Ireland's plans for growth in the dairy sector are formally set out in Food Wise 2025, Ireland's blueprint for the overall agrifood sector, where an all of sector agreed approach is set out including actions, benchmarks and targets for the dairy and other sectors. Notwithstanding challenges on the horizon, amongst which Brexit is paramount, stakeholders in the Irish dairy sector are well placed to benefit from expanding global demand.

In 2016, Ireland exported in the region of €4bn in dairy products to approaching 130 countries. Against the backdrop of EU agreed trade deals such as those completed with Canada and Japan, my Department continues to prioritise efforts to gain access to new 3rd country markets and, equally importantly, to deepen existing markets for Irish dairy products. In many instances such efforts are on foot of trade missions at Ministerial level. Food Wise 2025 outlines the huge potential for growth in agrifood exports to new and emerging markets, particularly in Asia, Africa and the Gulf region. In addition, against the background of Brexit, I have asked Bord Bia to conduct market profiling exercise to identify opportunities in new and more mature markets, and the output of this exercise will provide valuable market intelligence both for industry operators and policy makers.

Most recent CSO data available for the year to end August showed that growth in Irish dairy exports exceed 20% ahead of the same period in 2016, on foot of factors such as improving global prices, particularly evident in sectors such as butter, but also increases in volumes exported across a range of product categories. This demonstrates that our aforementioned efforts are contributing positively to Irish dairy sector exports.

While global demand for dairy products remains strong, the quality of Irish sourced milk is a key competitive advantage in our promotional efforts in new and existing markets. Investment in research and innovation, improvements in on-farm practices, and the development of added-value products are key priorities for Ireland's dairy sector. My Department will continue to review opportunities for growth in the sector, in collaboration with industry stakeholders.

In keeping with the priorities outlined in Food Wise 2025, I and Minister Doyle led trade missions to China, Singapore, Vietnam and South Korea in September 2016. In November 2016 I also led a trade mission to Morocco, which was extended at senior official level to include Algeria. Earlier in 2016, senior officials accompanied a Bord Bia trade mission to Iran.

In February 2017 I also led a very successful Trade Mission to the Gulf Region. This covered the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. More recently, in June of this year I led an extensive Trade Mission to the US and Mexico, and will be leading a trade mission to Japan and South Korea later this week.

Such missions serve to enhance and improve our existing levels of market access in these destinations. They also promote Ireland's reputation as a producer of high quality, safe and sustainably produced dairy products.

Ireland is strongly positioned as a competitive producer of dairy. It has enviable natural resources, adaptable and resilient producers, a strong international reputation, an effective dairy processing sector and a strong core of research infrastructure and expertise. My Department and I will continue to work with our partners in the dairy sector and with EU colleagues and international counterparts to ensure the development and maintenance of a sustainable dairy

sector in Ireland.

Agriculture Industry

187. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which his Department continues to monitor the cost of farm inputs with a view to maintaining a livelihood for farm families into the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47289/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The 2013 reform of the Common Agricultural Policy was a useful and progressive reform making the CAP fit for purpose to 2020. It provided Irish farmers and the agrifood sector with policy certainty for the years to come and with strategic financial support to increase sustainability and enhance competitiveness. I will continue to work with my EU colleagues to ensure that we engage in policies that promote the interests of the EU agricultural sector.

Food Wise 2025, the ten year strategy for the agrifood sector published in July 2015 identifies the opportunities and challenges facing the entire sector and provides an enabling strategy that will allow it to grow and prosper. Food Wise includes more than 400 specific recommendations, spread across the cross-cutting themes of sustainability, innovation, human capital, market development and competitiveness; as well as specific sectorial recommendations. The implementation process is driven by a High Level Implementation Committee, which I chair.

My Department continually monitors the cost of farm production inputs via the most recent data available from national and international sources. These include the Central Statistics Office's Agricultural Price Indices, Teagasc publications, EU level data from Eurostat and international equivalents from bodies such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation and OECD.

Cereal Sector

188. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he has had discussions with the cereal growing sector with a view to possible alleviation of difficulties arising from a difficult harvest; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47290/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am very aware of the needs of the cereal sector and have continued to engage actively with the stakeholders on the needs of the sector, particularly through the Tillage Stakeholders Forum. As Minister I am most conscious that the maintenance of an efficient and viable cereals sector in Ireland is clearly very important to the well being of the agrifood industry. Indigenous production of cereals is of course an important part of primary agriculture production. In addition to generating an income for our tillage farmers, the cereals sector is a key source of seed production, grain for the milling and malting industry and feeding stuffs for the livestock sector. The long-term average cereal production in Ireland is in the region of 2.2 million tonnes per annum and it is desirable to sustain this level of production in order to avoid over dependence on imported cereals.

The 2017 harvest is estimated by Teagasc to be in the region of 2.1 million tonnes, despite a decrease in the area devoted to tillage. This is mainly due to the availability of new improved varieties capable of higher yields and thereby helping to sustain a viable tillage sector. Cereal prices are highly sensitive to global supply and demand and volatility in prices is likely to re-

main a constant feature of Irish cereal prices in future; grain producers should factor such fluctuations into their planning and marketing strategies. I nonetheless acknowledge the continued tight margins experienced by growers and the challenges facing the sector, as global production due to higher yields continues to outstrip demand.

The Deputy may be aware of a number of measures I introduced in this regard to sustain the tillage sector and promote its growth in the future. Among these measures was a targeted crop loss support measure to assist growers most affected by the wet weather harvest conditions of September 2016.

In addition to this measure I also introduced the Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme and extended it to cover the tillage and horticulture sectors. I have been advised by the banks that all of the €150m is committed and is in the process of being drawn down. I am pleased at the very positive reaction by farmers, including tillage farmers, to the Scheme, which has proved that significant demand exists for low cost flexible finance.

I am pleased to have secured funding of €25 million for my Department to facilitate the development of a new Brexit response loan schemes for farmers, fishermen and food businesses in 2018. Further details will be announced in due course.

As additional support to tillage farmers I also introduced the Tillage Investment Scheme under TAMS II earlier this year. The specific areas of investment include Minimum Disturbance Tillage Equipment, Sprayers, Rain Water Harvesting, Grain Storage and Grain dryers. This Tillage Scheme is the latest of the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Schemes (TAMS II) to be launched under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. The closing date for applications under the second tranche of the new scheme was Friday 06th October 2017. There was a significant level of interest in investments under this measure with a total number of 687 applications received to date. 457 approvals have now issued in respect of the first tranche and payments and approvals are issuing on an ongoing basis.

My Department operates a range of services aimed at improving the level of production, quality and viability of the Irish cereal sector. These services include seed certification, seed testing, crop variety testing and the publication of recommended lists of varieties, research funding through the ‘Stimulus’ competitive research programme and funding for the quality assurance scheme. In addition, Teagasc provides research, training and advisory services for cereal producers. The value of all these support services is reflected in the fact that Irish cereals producers have consistently achieved some of the highest yields in the world.

Farm Enterprises

189. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the degree to which his Department remains committed to the concept of support for the family farm enterprise, having particular regard to particular challenges or threats; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47291/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The 2013 reform of the Common Agricultural Policy was a useful and progressive reform making the CAP fit for purpose to 2020. It provided Irish farmers and the agri-food sector with policy certainty for the years to come and with strategic financial support to increase sustainability and enhance competitiveness. I will continue to work with my EU colleagues to ensure that we engage in policies that promote the interests of the EU agricultural sector.

Food Wise 2025, the ten year strategy for the agri-food sector published in July 2015 identi-

fies the opportunities and challenges facing the entire sector and provides an enabling strategy that will allow it to grow and prosper. Food Wise includes more than 400 specific recommendations, spread across the cross-cutting themes of sustainability, innovation, human capital, market development and competitiveness, as well as specific sectorial recommendations. The implementation process is driven by a High Level Implementation Committee, which I chair.

My Department continually monitors the cost of farm production inputs via the most recent data available from national and international sources. These include the Central Statistics Office's Agricultural Price Indices, Teagasc publications, EU level data from Eurostat and international equivalents from bodies such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation and OECD.

Direct payments from my Department serve to support family farm income and act as a fundamental hedge against price volatility. Direct payments amounted to over €1.7 billion last year. Figures from Teagasc's National Farm Survey 2016 show that average payments per farm represented by the survey amounted to almost €18,000, accounting for 75% of family farm income.

Animal Welfare

190. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the degree to which his Department continues to monitor all aspects of animal welfare including canine and non-sporting equines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47292/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 is the main legal instrument available to my Department to enforce animal welfare standards. The Act puts clear obligations on owners regarding the need to look after animals under their care. Under the Act, authorised officer status has been given to a small number of employees of the ISPCA, DSPCA and the Turf Club to carry out duties limited to welfare.

My Department employs a large team of veterinary inspectors to enforce the provisions of the Act. Inspections, both announced and unannounced, are undertaken on a regular basis to ensure that the requirements of the Act are strictly adhered to. These inspections are scheduled on both a random and targeted basis. My Department also operates an anonymous helpline through which members of the public can express animal welfare concerns. These reports are promptly examined by trained veterinary staff countrywide and corrective action is taken in those cases where the Act has been breached. The Act also provides for severe penalties in the event of successful prosecutions.

The Farm Animal Welfare Advisory Council (FAWAC) was established by my Department in February 2002 on a non-statutory basis. It has been instrumental in promoting animal welfare in a practical way and providing a forum for different interest groups to meet, exchange views and reach consensus on the various challenges relating to animal welfare on farms.

While my Department remains the central reporting point for animal welfare concerns, it also works collaboratively on a range of issues with the Department of Rural and Community Development. Under Section 37(2) of the Animal Health and Welfare Act, 2013, the manager of a local authority may appoint authorised officers to exercise functions conferred on them for the purposes of enforcing the Act.

One area of such co-operation is the governance of canine welfare. A joint inspection regime of dog breeding establishments, involving the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Local Authority Veterinary Service, took place in 2015 for the purpose of inspection

and follow up action. While a very high percentage of inspections found the conditions of the animals to comply fully with the Act, corrective action was taken where necessary following the discovery of individual cases of non-compliance (mainly infrastructural in nature).

My Department also liaises on a daily basis with Local Authorities in relation to the enforcement of the Control of Horses Act 1996. In order to reduce the numbers of straying horses, my Department has provided funding to a number of local authorities to support the development of urban/traveller horse projects in their respective areas. A number of projects are currently being progressed by local authorities in conjunction with animal welfare organisations. These projects provide many benefits to communities including educational elements which enable greater compliance with animal welfare regulations thereby reducing numbers of straying horses. My Department continues to stress that it is the responsibility of individuals to ensure the welfare of horses in their ownership and/or their care and to dispose of them appropriately. I am glad to report a major improvement in horse welfare outcomes in recent years.

The Dublin Region Horse Welfare Group has recently been instigated by South Dublin County Council to directly address equine issues within the greater Dublin area. I welcome this initiative and my Department will work closely with our partners in Local Authorities, Welfare Groups and An Garda Síochána to achieve its aims.

The Deputy may be assured that this level of monitoring, enforcement and education will remain in place in the future, both by my Department and the various agencies of the State.

Mushroom Industry

191. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which the mushroom industry can recover from the ongoing impact of Brexit; if the issue has been sufficiently recognised at EU level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47293/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The UK is a very important market for Irish mushrooms accounting as it does for around 85% of our annual production. Access arrangements to the UK market post-Brexit will depend on the outcome of the UK's Brexit negotiations with the EU. However, during this period the Irish Government's position will continue to be to minimise the impact of Brexit on existing trade for all our food exports including mushrooms. As part of this process I have established a dedicated unit within my Department to consider and prepare for the direct impact of Brexit on our agri-food industry.

I am committed to working with the mushroom sector to assist it in adjusting to the challenges that lie ahead. My Department and its State Agencies currently provide supports on a number of fronts.

The 2018 Budget provided for a new "Brexit Loan Scheme" which will provide affordable, flexible finance to Irish businesses that are either currently impacted by Brexit or who will be in the future. The new Brexit Loan Scheme aims to make up to €300 million of working capital finance available to SMEs and mid-cap businesses (up to 499 employees). This will give Brexit-impacted businesses, including potentially a number of mushroom exporters, time and space to adapt and to grow into the future.

Due to State Aid legislation the Brexit Loan Scheme announced in Budget 2018 will not be available to primary producers including mushroom growers. In light of this I have secured €25 million in funding for my Department to facilitate the development of a new Brexit response

loan scheme for farmers, fishermen and food businesses in 2018 and further details on this will be announced in due course.

For the wider horticultural sector the Scheme of Investment Aid for the Development of the Commercial Horticulture Sector continues to be the main support for individual growers in the horticulture industry who wish to make capital investments in specialised equipment or buildings. I'm delighted to confirm that Budget 2018 allocated €5m in funding again for the Scheme in 2018, further reflecting this Government's commitment to ongoing support for the sector. The competitive nature of this scheme combined with its flexibility and ability to react to evolving situations are two key strengths in supporting this highly dynamic sector. An early opening of the scheme is anticipated.

The EU Producer Organisation (PO) scheme is also a vital support, with around 80% of Irish mushroom growers in a producer organisation at present. This scheme provides an important mechanism for growers to achieve greater bargaining power in the marketplace by becoming part of a larger supply base. In addition, this scheme is funding a number of initiatives to improve competitiveness, including Lean Training for mushroom growers. Indeed the concentration of supply through the PO Scheme has allowed exporters in many cases to negotiate Sterling price rises from their UK customers in response to the weakening of Sterling. Other contracts now have an inbuilt mechanism to protect against Sterling volatility or are based in Euro.

I can also confirm that starting in January 2018 An Bord Bia will commence a 3-year mushroom promotion campaign on the Irish and UK markets. This campaign will be co-funded by the industry and the European Commission. It is important to emphasise that the overall market for mushrooms in the UK and Ireland remains strong, showing good potential for further growth. This new promotion campaign will build on the success of previous similar initiatives and develop that growth in potential to increase exports.

Artisan Food Sector

192. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which supports continue to be made available to the artisan food sector, with particular reference to the need to ensure that the sector here has support equal to that in other EU jurisdictions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47294/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Food Wise 2025 recommends actions to support the sector to realise its potential, including festival markets, a pipeline for new entrants to the Artisan Food Market at Bloom, promoting meet the buyer opportunities, delivery of small business specific consumer and market insights, and programmes to assist producers to extend business reach.

Supports for the artisan food sector are available from the development agencies. A number of artisan businesses have participated in the Food Academy programme developed by Bord Bia, Local Enterprise Offices and Musgraves/Supervalu, which has delivered growth and jobs, Food Works (developed by Bord Bia, Teagasc and Enterprise Ireland for start-up food entrepreneurs) and from technical assistance from Teagasc.

The farmhouse cheese sector alone includes over 50 cheese-makers producing more than 150 types of cheese valued at over €12 million per annum at farm gate level. The sector is innovative with over 17 new farmhouse cheeses developed in the past year. My Department has supported a three year Bord Bia farmhouse cheese programme under the EU Promotion regime.

In terms of small food businesses in general, close to 500 food companies with a turnover

of €100k-€3.5m are registered with Bord Bia for supports and services. These owner managed businesses tend to produce high-end products with a strong focus on the domestic market.

In addition, over the last 5 years over 400 new companies with revenues of less than €100k have entered the sector. Through the Food Academy Start programme, these companies typically start with a standardised support package delivered by the Local Enterprise Offices nationally. This collaborative approach ensures the skills and capabilities of early stage companies are developed through a 'learn by doing' approach and over 300 companies have been given the opportunity to get product on the Food Academy fixture.

Farmers markets remain a valuable entry point for many potential food entrepreneurs and those building a local and visitor customer base. In the past year Bord Bia ran workshops for market managers to support the development of this important local route to market. Feedback was highly positive.

My Department provides bursaries for the UCC Diploma in Speciality Food Production, a food science and business course for food producers, potential start-ups and those interested in developing businesses and/or promoting the artisan sector. Bord Bia, Teagasc and the FSAI contribute to the work of the Diploma. Over 180 students have graduated, many are successfully running small artisan and speciality food businesses.

Agrifood Sector

193. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he has identified weaknesses arising from price fluctuations in the various segments of the food sector; if he has identified mechanisms to address these issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47295/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Managing price volatility is a challenge for the agri-food sector, but significant State supports are in place to assist the sector in managing volatility.

Food Wise 2025, the latest ten year strategy for the agri-food sector, includes more than 400 specific recommendations, spread across the cross-cutting themes of sustainability, innovation, human capital, market development and competitiveness, as well as specific sectorial recommendations. The implementation process for any strategy is vital for its success and I chair the Food Wise High Level Implementation Committee (HLIC), with high level representatives from all the relevant Departments and State agencies. The committee reviews progress on detailed actions on a quarterly basis, in order to identify and solve problems quickly. Stakeholders regularly present to the committee meetings on their priorities for particular sectors or themes.

The uncertainty around Brexit is a challenge for the sector, but concerns about the impact on the agri-food sector are at the top of the Government's Brexit agenda. Our ongoing consultation with stakeholders, together with our engagement with UK, Northern Ireland and EU counterparts, will be informed by the need to have the implications for the agri-food sector understood and taken account of as the negotiations unfold. My Department and State agencies are working together to ensure that the short-term and longer term impacts of Brexit are taken into consideration, and that appropriate supports are in place to help the sector to respond and adapt to the new realities.

With regard to farm incomes and volatility, Teagasc's National Farm Survey 2016 showed average farm income of €24,000. Average farm income has been relatively stable over the last few years, fluctuating between €24,000 and €26,000. However, there are significant differences

in farm income depending on the farming system and size of farm. It should also be borne in mind that over 60% of the farms represented by the National Farm Survey are classified as part-time, based on labour input required. On half of farms, either the holder and/or spouse has off-farm employment.

My Department will continue to engage with the Department of Finance on key agri-taxation policy objectives, including responses to income and price volatility.

Ireland is a small open economy which exports the vast bulk of its food production, and therefore will always feel the effects of volatility on world markets. Dairy farms, which have significantly higher incomes on average than other farming systems, also experience greater income volatility. The introduction of fixed price contracts by some processors is increasingly becoming a feature of the producer/processor relationship in the dairy sector, with numerous milk purchasers offering such contracts, which provide producers with the opportunity to lock in prices over the medium term, taking costs of production into account. Such relationships are a welcome development in terms of their potential to mitigate volatility.

One of my priorities has been to address the impact of the change in the sterling exchange rate and lower commodity prices in some agriculture sectors.

The “Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme” was such a mechanism and was developed by my Department in co-operation with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI), making €150 million available to farmers this year at interest rates of 2.95%. There has been a very positive reaction by farmers to the Scheme, which has proved that significant demand exists for low cost flexible finance.

The new Brexit Loan Scheme announced in Budget 2018, based on the template of the Agri Cashflow Loan scheme, aims to make up to €300 million of working capital finance available to SMEs and mid-cap businesses. Given their unique exposure to the UK market, my Department’s funding (€9 million out of total public funding of €23 million) ensures that at least 40% of the fund will be available to food businesses. Due to State Aid rules, this scheme will not be available to farmers and fishermen. However, my Department has secured funding of €25 million to facilitate the development of further Brexit response loan schemes for farmers, fishermen and food businesses in 2018. Further details will be announced in due course.

I am confident that my Department is taking every step to support measures which mitigate price volatility and improve competitiveness in the sector.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

194. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he will take to have basic payments and ANC payments due to a person (details supplied) issued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47329/17]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted a 2017 Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraint Schemes application on 10 May 2017. EU Regulations governing the administration of these schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including in some cases remote sensing (i.e. satellite) inspections, be completed before any payments issue.

The application of the person named was selected for a Remote Sensing eligibility inspection. The final inspection outcome has now been finalised with the intention of issuing any payments due under these schemes to the nominated bank account of the person named shortly.

Offshore Exploration

195. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the detail of the environmental impact assessment carried out prior to his approval in July 2017 for offshore drilling at the Druid-Drombeg exploration field; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47278/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): Successful exploration in Ireland's offshore has the potential to deliver benefits to Irish society and the economy, particularly in terms of enhanced security of supply and reduced fossil fuel imports. However, any such exploration must be conducted in an environmentally sensitive manner.

In 2015, my Department completed the Irish Offshore Strategic Environmental Study 5 (IOSEA5) process with the adoption of the Plan underpinning IOSEA5 and publication of the IOSEA5 Statement. The objectives of IOSEA5 were to inform my Department of specific environmental considerations in future petroleum activities under licensing rounds in the Atlantic Margin Basins, as well as the award of licences in the Celtic and Irish Seas; and to provide exploration companies working offshore with an operational baseline against which they can conduct their work and ensure the protection of the marine environment. On 11 July 2017, approval to drill an exploratory well within Block 53/6-A in the southern Porcupine Basin off the south west coast of Ireland was granted to Providence Resources Plc. Prior to granting approval, the application to drill from Providence Resources was considered against a range of technical, environmental, and financial requirements. In addition, the company had to obtain a safety permit from the Commission for Energy Regulation and approval by the Irish Coast Guard for the company's Oil Spill Contingency Plan and Well Emergency Response Plan. In respect of environmental requirements, the company was required to submit an Environmental Risk Assessment and a Natura Impact Screening (Appropriate Assessment) Statement in support of its application to commence drilling activities and these were considered in the context of the likely effects on the environment of the proposed drilling. A review was undertaken for my Department by Bec Consultants, an independent consultancy appointed for their expertise in ecological and conservation marine biology to inter alia:

- examine the submitted Environmental Statement and assess whether or not it met the scope and quality of requirements set out or implied by the specific European and Irish Environmental Impact Assessment legislation and guidelines;

- appraise the Environmental Statement, highlighting any deficiencies in respect of the statutory requirements of the Statement and detailing the outcome and resolution of any such deficiencies; and

- ensure that the requirements of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011, for an assessment to be carried out on any plan or project likely to have a significant effect on a protected site or species were met by the Appropriate Assessment Screening Report. In addition, the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, was requested to provide its observations in terms of Natura 2000 sites, where relevant, and Annex IV species (Cetaceans) in accordance with the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). The documentation associated with this environmental assessment is available on my Department's website. In addition, during the course of offshore exploration operations, my Department audits environmental compliance by reviewing daily environmental reporting, as well as daily operational reports for both geophysical survey and drilling operations. A rig inspection visit also takes place during operations in order to audit compliance with the conditions associated with the use and discharge of added chemicals, in accordance with the

OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment in the North-East Atlantic.

Advertising Regulation

196. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the fact that television service providers based and operating here are broadcasting recruitment advertisements for armed forces outside the State (details supplied); the steps he will take to ensure that persons here are not subject to the recruitment drives of other States' armed forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47320/17]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The provision of broadcasting and on-demand audiovisual services in the European Union is governed by the Audio Visual Media Services Directive (AVMSD).

Under the country of origin rules laid down by the AVMSD, audiovisual media services are only subject to the regulations in the Member State where they are established. They are not subject to the regulations in each individual Member State where they are made available and may not be subjected to such regulations except in the very limited circumstances provided for in Articles 3 and 4 of the AVMSD.

As the channel referred to in the question is licensed and regulated by the UK Regulator, OFCOM, I have no function in the matter.

Matters relating to the Defence Act 1954 are the responsibility of the Minister for Defence.

Rural Transport Services

197. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a community transport service (details supplied) in County Mayo is to cease operation by the end of 2017; if the circumstances of the discontinuation of the service can be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47182/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department provides funding for the Rural Transport Programme (RTP) to the National Transport Authority (NTA).

The NTA has national responsibility for integrated local and rural transport, including, since 2012, management of the RTP.

In light of the NTA's responsibilities in this matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Tourism Project Funding

198. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if grants are available from his Department for a person to re-roof an old forge. [47192/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): My Department does not provide direct grants for the purpose outlined by the

deputy. My Department's role in relation to tourism lies primarily in the area of national tourism policy. It is not directly involved in the management or development of individual tourism projects. These are operational matters for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland.

Fáilte Ireland provides capital funding for investment in tourism attractions, as well as advice on supports available from other agencies.

I would suggest that the Deputy should advise the person to contact Fáilte Ireland with details of the project involved and they will be able to advise if the project might be eligible for funding under any of Fáilte Ireland's grant schemes for tourism projects.

Sports Capital Programme

199. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the sports capital programme will be announced in view of the fact that the previously stated date for announcement has passed. [47204/17]

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 Tolls

200. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to an anomaly by which commercial vehicles that are privately taxed by their owners are charged commercial rates on road tolls; if the issue can be rectified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47260/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy in relation to roads.

More specifically, the statutory powers to levy tolls on national roads as well as regional and local roads, to make toll bye-laws and to enter into toll agreements with private investors are vested in TII (for national roads) and each local authority (for regional and local roads) under Part V of the Roads Act 1993 (as amended by the Planning and Development Act 2000 and the Roads Act 2007). Separately the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government has responsibility for Motor Tax Policy.

The Deputy will note that tolls in Ireland vary according to type and size of vehicles, and reflect inter alia the impact of their use on the toll road. They are publicly available on the www.etoll.ie website. Motor tax rates are set by reference to a range of factors, including not only the class of vehicle but also the specific nature of its use as well either engine size, historically,

or CO2 emissions, more recently. These reflect a wide range of policy considerations and are available on www.housing.ie.

There is no basis for rates to correspond between these two very different regimes of tolls for use and motor taxation and therefore it is incorrect to refer to there being any anomaly between the two.

Tourism Project Funding

201. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if alternative funding will be provided for a group (details supplied). [47312/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The main role of my Department in relation to tourism lies in the area of national tourism policy development. It is not involved in the development or management of individual tourism projects, which are operational matters for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland and other agencies.

My Department provides funding to the two tourism agencies, Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland, to promote tourism initiatives both domestically and internationally. Fáilte Ireland works with the relevant local authorities to develop the signature brands in their areas.

Individual tourism businesses can apply for funding under Fáilte Ireland's Capital Grants Schemes and, through the relevant local authority, for Festivals and Events funding. I am informed by Fáilte Ireland that there are no other mechanisms by which it can provide funding to organisations.

However I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply to the Deputy with any further information that it might consider relevant. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Transport Policy

202. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the criteria required to obtain a limousine licence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47314/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including the regulatory framework for licensing of limousines, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

I have referred your question to the NTA for direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Irish Language

203. **Deputy Peadar Kirby** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department will engage with all groups within the Gaeltacht in Irish. [47161/17]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I am not clear if the Deputy has particular organisations in mind. My Department is committed to engaging in

Irish with all groups and individuals who wish to do so, including those within the Gaeltacht.

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

At a more general level, my Department seeks to comply with its obligations under the Official Languages Act and is currently engaged with the Coimisinéir Teanga in the review of our Scheme under that Act with regard to the implementation of those obligations.

Invalidity Pension Eligibility

204. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when persons who are self-employed will be in a position to apply for an invalidity pension; if the contribution rule has been determined; her plans to provide the option of partial capacity benefit for self-employed persons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47166/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Self-employed contributors will be eligible for the invalidity pension from December 2017. This is a major reform as self-employed people could have access to income support without having to go through a means test, if they become permanently incapable of work as a result of an illness or disability. Details as to how to apply will be made public by my Department in the coming weeks.

Partial capacity benefit (PCB) is designed for people who have some capacity for work and who wish to return to the workforce. To participate on this scheme the applicant must be in receipt of either invalidity pension or illness benefit – illness benefit must be in payment for at least six months at the date of application for PCB (the six months rule does not apply to invalidity pension). Self-employed persons who are awarded an invalidity pension could potentially have access to this scheme in due course as a consequence of the extension of invalidity pension to them.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pension Provisions

205. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if pension entitlements will be introduced for community employment supervisors; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47173/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Community Employment (CE) scheme supervisors are employees of private companies in the community and voluntary sector. The State is not responsible for funding pension arrangements for such employees even where the companies in question are reliant on State funding. It is open to individuals to make provision for a pension by way of PRSA which all employers are obliged to facilitate.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the issue of CE supervisors' pension provision is currently being examined by a Community Sector High Level Forum, chaired by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. My Department is represented on this group, as are IM-PACT, SIPTU, Pobal and other relevant Government Departments. I understand their work is ongoing and that the Forum is due to meet again later in November 2017.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Payments

206. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of the payment of rent allowance in respect of a property (details supplied); the reason payment to the tenant was not suspended on receipt of reports that rent payment was not being made to the landlord; and the action she will take to clarify this situation. [47178/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I refer to the reply to the Deputy's previous PQ about this matter. Reference Number 42721-17 refers.

The planned review of the case is currently underway but is not yet completed. A response will be provided shortly to the Deputy in this regard.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Eligibility

207. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the national fuel allowance scheme will be reviewed in respect of persons who are in receipt of social welfare and reside with a person who is in receipt of the minimum wage or is on low income but is over the threshold of €100 per week in view of the difficulties many persons on social welfare experience in meeting the cost of purchasing fuel. [47183/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The fuel allowance is a payment of €22.50 per week from October to April, to 376,000 low income households to assist them with their energy costs. The allowance represents a contribution towards the energy costs of a household. It is not intended to meet those costs in full. Only one allowance is paid per household.

The criteria for Fuel Allowance are framed in order to direct the limited resources available to my Department in as targeted a manner as possible. People who are in receipt of a qualifying contributory payment must also satisfy a means test. All non-contributory recipients are accepted as satisfying this means test.

A fuel applicant and members of his/her household may have a combined assessable income of up to €100 a week above the appropriate rate of State Pension Contributory and qualify for a payment. This ensures that the fuel allowance payment goes to those who are more vulnerable to fuel poverty including those reliant on social protection payments for longer periods and who are unlikely to have additional resources of their own. The €100 a week means limit is significantly higher than the weekly fuel allowance rate of €22.50 and also the combined weekly total of household benefits and fuel allowance added together (€33.65).

Fuel applicants must also satisfy the household composition criteria, i.e., they must live

alone or only with the following:

- a qualified spouse / civil partner / cohabitant or qualified child(ren);
- a person in receipt of a qualifying payment who would be entitled to the allowance in their own right;
- a person who is receipt of Carer's Allowance or Carer's Benefit in respect of providing full time care and attention to the Fuel Allowance applicant or their qualified spouse / civil partner / cohabitant or qualified child(ren);
- a person receiving short term Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) or Basic Supplementary Welfare Allowance (less than 391 days for JA and less than 15months/456 days for Basic SWA).

Therefore a social welfare dependant who is living with someone other than those listed above would not be entitled to the fuel allowance.

The Guidelines for the Fuel Allowance Scheme are kept under review. However, any decision to change the household composition requirement and to increase the combined assessable income for a household would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme, a special heating supplement may be paid to assist people in certain circumstances who have special heating needs due to ill health or infirmity. Exceptional needs payments may also be made to help meet an essential, once-off cost which a person is unable to meet from his/her own resources.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Payments Administration

208. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) in County Kildare will change from their current social welfare payment; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47198/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I can confirm that the person concerned is currently in receipt of carer's allowance (CA) at the weekly rate of €209.00. From 30 November 2017 this rate is set to increase to €247.00 weekly as he will have reached State pension age.

However, I note that the person concerned has made an application for state pension contributory (SPC).

Normally two social welfare income supports are not payable at the same time. However, CA can be paid at the same time as another social welfare payment. When a person is in receipt of a social welfare payment (other than jobseeker payments or supplementary welfare allowance) or is being claimed as a qualified adult on their spouse's, civil partner's or cohabitant's social welfare payment, and also qualifies for CA, the allowance is paid at up to half the normal rate.

In this case, for example, if the person concerned is awarded SPC, he will be paid CA at the weekly rate of €123.50 in addition to their SPC.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pensions Data

209. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of recipients of the State pension contributory, State pension non-contributory, widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's pension contributory and death benefit, by gender, in tabular form. [47202/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested (where available) by the Deputy is detailed in the attached tabular statement.

Scheme recipients by sex at 31 October 2017

Scheme	Male	Female	Total
State Pension Contributory	247,014	144,984	391,998
State Pension Non-Contributory	36,726	58,269	94,995
Widow's, Widower's and Surviving Civil Partner's Pension (Contributory)	17,931	103,212	121,143
Death Benefit	14	719	733
Totals	301,685	307,184	608,869

Social Welfare Fraud Data

210. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons investigated for social welfare fraud since the roll-out of the social welfare fraud campaign; the number of those investigated that were found to be committing fraud; the number of cases found to be in error by her Department; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47203/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The social welfare fraud awareness campaign from earlier this year was designed to encourage a discussion and debate about social welfare fraud and to challenge the perceptions of those who see it as a victimless crime, while promoting the Department's online and telephone fraud-reporting services.

It was also aimed at demonstrating the considerable work undertaken by the Department to deter, prevent and detect fraud through control reviews and investigations of payments to customers. This campaign was also designed:

- To help raise overall awareness of the consequences of welfare fraud and the positive role that can be played by members of the public in supporting the Department in its work; and
- To remind customers to contact the Department if their circumstances change, thereby helping to reduce and prevent customer errors in claims, as well as deliberate fraud.

It is important to note that the advertising campaign commenced in April this year and, therefore, statistics to date would not be indicative of the overall results of the campaign, nor do these statistics alone reflect the complete set of objectives set for the campaign. The success will also be measured by behaviour and attitudinal changes to welfare fraud also and public awareness of fraud reporting services.

The number of reports registered to the end of September stood at just over 16,500, compared to just over 13,900 in the same period last year, an increase of 19% approximately.

It is the policy of my Department to examine all reports of reported suspected fraud and abuse. Of the overall numbers received to end September, close to 14,000 have been examined and following the initial stages of examination, close to 9,000 have been referred for further investigation and appropriate follow-up action.

It is important to note that a payment is not suspended or stopped solely on the basis of a report received. The report provides a “trigger” for the instigation of a review of a specific entitlement and further investigation if that is considered to be warranted.

It is also important to note that anonymous reports are not available to Deciding Officers when they are making their decisions on cases. The Deciding Officer’s decision must be based on the full facts and circumstances of the case and, as a result, statistics are not available on the outcome of anonymous reports. Furthermore, anonymous or confidential reports of abuse do not form any part of the evidence when a case is being considered for prosecution.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

211. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if eligibility for a State pension contributory will be reviewed in the case of a person (details supplied); her plans to review circumstances such as in the case of this person in the interest of equality and fairness; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47214/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): According to the records of my Department, the person concerned has a total of 442 paid full-rate social insurance contributions. As this is less than 520 full-rate social insurance contributions, one of the qualifying conditions for state pension (contributory), the person is not entitled to the state pension (contributory) and was notified in writing of this decision on 23 November 2015.

Where a person who has been engaged in caring duties applies for state pension (contributory) their entitlement to the homemaker’s scheme may be examined. The homemaker’s scheme will not, of itself, qualify a person for a state pension (contributory). The qualifying conditions for the pension must also be satisfied, requiring a person to have entered insurable employment before the age of 56, have paid a minimum of 520 full-rate social insurance contributions (credited contributions do not satisfy this condition) and achieve a yearly average of at least 10. As the person concerned does not satisfy the qualifying conditions for state pension (contributory), the homemaker’s scheme is not applicable in this case.

If the person concerned feels that there are any periods of employment which have not been accounted for in the social insurance record they should send documentary evidence to my Department and the matter will be investigated.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Eligibility

212. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) can be provided with a supplementary welfare payment as opposed to jobseeker’s allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47237/17]

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

person concerned was in receipt of illness benefit from 18/6/16 until 27/5/17. He received an interim payment of supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) for one week while his claim for jobseekers allowance was processed and he has been in receipt of jobseekers allowance with effect from 29/5/17.

In addition, the person concerned submitted an application for invalidity pension with effect from 16/6/17 and the claim was disallowed. He has appealed this disallowance and is awaiting a decision. In line with the Department's normal activation measures, the person concerned was referred to the JobPath service on 19/8/17. However, it has now been decided to defer this engagement pending a decision on his appeal and in the meantime his payment on jobseekers allowance will be maintained.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

213. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress to date in the determination of an appeal for invalidity pension by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47259/17]

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 23 October 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.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications

214. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application for a domiciliary care allowance by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47277/17]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The Department is currently experiencing delays in the processing of Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) claims due to an increase in claim volumes and the need for more detailed decisions to be provided, following a High Court ruling. Corrective actions are in place, including having additional deciding officers assigned to the scheme. As a result average processing times have reduced over recent weeks and at present it is taking 17 weeks on average to finalise an application.

Applications are processed in date of receipt order, having regard to the complexity of each individual case. An application for DCA was received in the Department from this lady on the 23rd August 2017. While it is not feasible to provide an exact date for when a particular application will be finalised, the applications currently being finalised were received in July 2017.

This application will be considered by a Deciding Officer and the decision notified as soon as possible.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Rates

215. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to a recent report (details supplied) which highlights the additional living costs for visually impaired persons and the differential rate of their minimum essential standard of living; her views on the report; the steps she will take to address its findings; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47321/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The findings of the recent National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI) and Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) report on a minimum essential standard of living (MESL) for a single adult with vision impairment have been made available to my Department. The results of this research are a useful contribution to analysis on the issue of income adequacy in general. This research is an adaptation of the VBSJ's studies on the minimum essential standard of living for the general population, which have estimated the level of income needed to meet an individual's / household's physical, psychological and social needs, and which is calculated by identifying the goods and services required by different household types in order to meet these minimum needs.

The findings show that the cost of an MESL is estimated to be higher for a person with vision impairment than for members of the general population who have full sight. Overall, the additional cost in 2016 for an individual with vision impairment was €44. 54 more than the cost for a single adult in the main MESL (€241. 22).

People with vision impairment who require income support can apply to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection for a blind person's pension. This is the only scheme for a specific disability operated by the Department and was introduced almost 100 years ago in 1920. To be eligible for this payment, the applicant must satisfy a number of conditions set down by legislation: be at least 18 years of age and under the pension age; be so blind that he or she either cannot perform any work for which eyesight is essential or cannot continue his or her ordinary occupation, satisfy a means test, and satisfy the habitual residency condition.

There are currently some 1,280 people in receipt of a blind person's pension at a cost of some €13. 5 million in 2017.

Alternatively, the disability allowance payment can be claimed by a person with vision impairment which substantially restricts them in undertaking suitable employment. The current rate of payment for both the blind person's pension and the disability allowance is €193 per week for a single person. Budget 2018 provides an additional €5 per week for each of these payments, bringing the rate up to €198 per week next year.

Primary weekly social welfare payments are intended to enable recipients to meet their basic day-to-day income needs. Recipients may also be entitled to a range of other payments, both cash and non-cash, which are considered secondary in nature. In this regard, recipients of the blind person's pension or disability allowance may also be entitled to a free travel pass and the household benefits package. In addition to these, I understand that the Health Service Executive operates a supplement means-tested scheme – the blind welfare allowance – for blind people receiving certain welfare payments, including the blind pension. The current rate of

payment is €58. 50 per week for a single person.

Any further increases in the rates of primary and secondary payments to persons with disabilities including those with vision impairment would have to be considered in the context of the annual budgetary process.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

216. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason an appeal for carer's allowance by a person (details supplied) has not been addressed; if the appeal will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [47323/17]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's Allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment, made to a person who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has a disability such that they require that level of care.

The Department periodically reviews claims in payment to ensure that there is continued entitlement. Following a review in this case it was determined that the evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied.

The person concerned was notified on 25 November 2015 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal. The person concerned requested a review of this decision and submitted additional evidence in support of her application, however the decision remained unchanged.

Following several subsequent reviews, it was determined that the evidence did not indicate that the requirement for full-time care was satisfied. The person concerned was notified of the most recent outcome on 17 February 2017, the reasons for it and of her right of appeal.

The person concerned appealed this decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO) on 4 March 2017. A submission in support of the decision was prepared and forwarded to the SWAO on 6 Nov 2017 for determination.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Wind Energy Guidelines

217. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the expected timeframe for the new national wind energy guidelines to be put on a statutory basis. [47193/17]

219. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he expects the new national wind energy guidelines to be put on a statutory basis. [47221/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 217 and 219 together.

My predecessor as Minister, in conjunction with my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, announced an emerging "preferred draft approach"

to the review of the 2006 Wind Energy Development Guidelines in June 2017.

A copy of the announcement is available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/planning/guidelines/wind-energy/coveney-and-naughten-announce-key-development-review-wind-energy-development-guidelines>.

As part of the overall review, a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) will be undertaken on the "preferred draft approach" to the revised Guidelines before they come into effect. This is in accordance with the requirements of EU Directive 2001/24/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment, the SEA Directive. SEA is a process by which environmental considerations are required to be fully integrated into the preparation of plans and programmes which act as frameworks for development consent, prior to their final adoption, with public consultation as part of that process.

It is envisaged that the SEA process will take approximately nine months and tendering to engage the necessary expertise to carry out that process is currently underway. In light of the SEA requirements, it is expected that the revisions to the Guidelines will not be finalised and come into effect until 2018. In the meantime, the current Guidelines remain in force.

When finalised, the revised Guidelines will be issued under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. Planning authorities, and, where applicable, An Bord Pleanála must have regard to guidelines issued under Section 28 in the performance of their functions generally under the Planning Acts.

Water Charges Administration

218. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which water charges will be dealt with for students paying the charge through property management companies (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47213/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Water Services Bill 2017 is currently being considered by the Oireachtas. The Bill provides for Irish Water to make refunds to customers who paid domestic water charges since 1 January 2015. In making the refunds the guiding principle for Irish Water will be to make refunds directly to the account holder. In the instance where a Management Company is the Irish Water account holder and where that company paid domestic water charges it will be necessary for the individuals concerned who paid their water charges through this medium to engage with the relevant management company. I understand that Irish Water has, as part of the preparations for making refunds, engaged with the Residential Landlords Association of Ireland to ensure that the refund of domestic water charges operates as efficiently and effectively as possible in landlord/tenant situations.

Question No. 219 answered with Question No. 217.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

220. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to make provision for affordable housing for young persons in employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47245/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

The Government recognises the housing affordability pressures faced by households with low to moderate income in parts of the country where housing costs are highest. Therefore, housing affordability has been examined by my Department, in consultation with the Housing Agency, local authorities and other stakeholders as part of the targeted review of Rebuilding Ireland.

The examination was carried out under the generally accepted premise that housing is deemed affordable where households, particularly low or moderate income households, are paying no more than a third of their disposable income on meeting their accommodation needs.

The work took account of the measures already taken to make housing more affordable. These include the streamlined planning system for large-scale housing developments; reduced development contributions; the €226 million LIHAF funding, the impact of Rent Pressure Zones and changes to apartment guidelines in 2015.

It also took account of the additional housing affordability measures contained in Budget 2018. As announced, there will be a second phase of the LIHAF infrastructure fund with an Exchequer contribution of €50 million to unlock additional lands for housing.

I have also secured funding of €25 million, to be provided over 2018 and 2019, to unlock local authority owned land specifically to deliver affordable housing. Local authorities have already worked very successfully with co-operative housing bodies in delivering infrastructure on local authority owned sites so that co-operatives can make affordable housing available. This model is to be made available on a far greater scale.

The housing affordability examination is now at an advanced stage and I expect to be in a position to outline the outcome, including any additional measures, in the coming weeks.

Local Authority Housing Standards

221. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the finding by the European Committee of Social Rights that the standard of some local authority housing here is in violation of the Article 16 of the European Social Charter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47325/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

The recent findings of the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) by the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) are being taken very seriously and Ireland will provide a formal reply to the findings shortly.

It is important to note that the Committee found no violations by Ireland in respect of many of the key provisions of the Human Rights Charter, including Articles on non-discrimination, the right to protection of health, the right of children and young persons to social, legal and economic protection, and the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion.

However, notwithstanding those findings of ‘no violations’, the adverse findings against Ireland in relation to Article 16 (the right of the family to social, legal and economic protection) are currently being reviewed and considered.

Remedies in respect of key issues on which complaints were upheld against Ireland are already in train. The regeneration of Dolphin House has commenced since the complaint was made to the ECSR and the first phase of the project is currently on site. This phase consists of the deep retrofitting of 3 of the existing housing blocks to provide 63 refurbished apartments

and 37 new build units, comprised of 28 apartments and 9 houses, to give an overall total of 100 new and refurbished units at a cost of €25.5 million.

The regeneration of St Teresa's Gardens is also underway and significant funding has been provided to Dublin City Council for de-tenanting, enabling works and demolitions. The new build element will commence in 2018, with 50 social homes planned for phase 1. As with Dolphin House, the Government is committed to this regeneration project and to the beneficial change in living circumstances it will bring to the residents of the area. In addition, the national Regeneration Programme continues to be rolled out in other areas in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Tralee, Sligo and Dundalk.

These projects are all yielding significant improvements to the housing conditions in the areas involved, as well as investing in social and economic programmes to support holistic improvements in the living circumstances of the areas' residents.

The importance of a preventative maintenance programme for social housing stock has been explicitly recognised in the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan, under which all local authorities will adopt a preventative maintenance approach to housing stock management, including consistent standards and pro-active approaches, and adopt a common national re-letting performance standard.

Other remedies will also be considered to address the ECSR findings.

Commencement of Legislation

222. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason he has not brought into effect Chapter 2 of Part 2 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 which places an obligation on each housing authority to make a housing service plan; the steps he will take to bring this section of the Act into effect; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [47327/17]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Housing Services Plans are provided for in sections 14 -18 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, which has not been commenced.

Section 14 requires that each housing authority make a Housing Services Plan setting out the objectives which the housing authority considers to be reasonable and necessary for the provision of housing services having regard to the requirements of the housing strategy or strategies relating to housing supports for its administrative area.

The first plan would be made within a time set out by the Minister, subsequent plans would be made within six months of the making of the Development Plan.

Housing Services are defined as, among other things:

- social housing support;
- affordable housing;
- the granting of shared ownership leases under section 3 of the Act of 1992;
- the sale, or consent to the sale, of a dwelling under section 90(1)(b) of the Principal Act to a person other than another housing authority;

- loans made under section 11 of the Act of 1992 or section 25(1) of the Housing (Traveller accommodation) Act 1998;
- grants for works of improvement or adaptation to houses under section 5 of the Act of 1992;
- grants and other assistance for the provision of new houses or improvement works to houses under section 6 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1979;
- services provided to homeless persons under section 10 of the Act of 1988;
- the provision of sites under section 57 of the Principal Act;
- the management, maintenance and refurbishment of any dwelling, building or land of which the housing authority is the owner or which is under its management and control.

The provisions provide for the making of a Housing Services Plan in draft form first, its circulation to the Minister and other bodies (including AHBs and the HSE) for comments, the preparation of a report for the elected members by the Chief Executive and the adoption of the Plan by the members, with or without modification.

While these provisions have not yet been commenced, this has not acted as an impediment to the delivery of significantly increased and enhanced housing services by local authorities and AHBs, driven by the substantially increased resources and new initiatives under Rebuilding Ireland. However, I will be keeping the matter under review, particularly in the context of the setting of new social housing delivery targets for all local authorities for 2018 onwards.