

## Written Answers.

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

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*Questions Nos. 1 to 17, inclusive, answered orally.*

*Questions Nos. 18 to 24, inclusive, resubmitted.*

*Questions Nos. 25 to 34, inclusive, answered orally.*

### **Brexit Negotiations**

35. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the briefings he has had on the Brexit negotiations, in particular in respect of the Border issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53038/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I have discussions with my officials on an ongoing basis on all aspects of the EU-UK exit negotiations, and our national response to the impact of Brexit is unrelenting. I have regular meetings with my senior officials, including our Permanent Representative to the EU and our Ambassador in London, to discuss developments in the negotiations and these meetings have intensified in recent weeks. I also have frequent meetings with my officials on specific issues as the need arises and my office maintains a regular line of contact with the core team in my Department working on Brexit issues, as well as with senior officials in the Department of the Taoiseach and other relevant Departments.

Our Permanent Representation in Brussels and our Embassies in all EU Member States ensure that I am kept informed of the concerns and priorities of the EU Institutions and our EU partners and their views in relation to the Irish-specific issues. My officials based in Belfast and in Armagh also keep me informed of ongoing contacts in Northern Ireland on Brexit-related issues.

Since I took office as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade in June of this year, my priority has been to ensure that, not only am I kept fully briefed on the Brexit negotiations and on the border issue, but that - working closely with the Taoiseach and Minister of State McEntee - I am actively engaged in what is an existential matter for this island. I have taken time to meet with and hear from people in businesses and community organisations in Northern Ireland and the border region to deepen further my own understanding of this complex situation. The All-Island Civic Dialogue has also been invaluable in this regard.

Through all of this, I believe that the position being taken by the Government in relation to the border issue is the correct one. This approach proved successful in achieving our goals in

phase one. These goals include the maintenance of the Common Travel Area, protection of the Good Friday Agreement including North South cooperation, and protection of EU citizenship and other rights. We have achieved the most important commitment of avoiding a hard border and the UK has set out in detail how this could be achieved. In the absence of an agreed solution the UK has committed to maintaining full alignment with the rules of the Internal Market and the Customs Union which, now or in the future, support the all-island economy and the protection of the Good Friday Agreement including North-South co-operation. This will ensure that people's lives and livelihoods are protected and that communities and businesses in the border region are given every opportunity to develop and prosper. I therefore look forward to a positive outcome from this week's European Council which will allow the EU-UK negotiations to proceed to phase II.

*Question No. 36 answered orally.*

### **Middle East Issues**

37. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the declaration by President the United States of America that Jerusalem is the capital of the state of Israel; his views on whether Israel's occupation of east Jerusalem violates numerous international laws; his further views on whether this declaration is reckless and dangerous; and the timeframe for the government to recognise the state of Palestine with east Jerusalem as its capital in view of the motion unanimously passed in Dáil Éireann on 10 December 2014 calling for same. [53148/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I refer the Deputy to my earlier reply to Priority Question no 28 concerning the United States Government announcement on Jerusalem, and to the statement which I issued on behalf of the Government on 6 December. I will not repeat those again now.

The Government is committed to recognising the State of Palestine as part of a lasting settlement of the conflict. Ireland has long looked forward to being able to recognise a sovereign Palestinian state existing in fact and not just in theory.

Ireland normally recognises states that actually exist and control their territory, and so successive Irish Governments have seen recognition of Palestine coming as part of an overall peace agreement.

However, in view of the long-term frustration of that ideal, and in particular in the light of the motions passed by the Dáil and Seanad in 2014, I am also considering whether early recognition now by Ireland of a state of Palestine, in advance of its actual achievement on the ground, could play a helpful part in advancing a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

There are many varied factors bearing on this question. They include the likely impact of such a move on the peace process, the possible value of recognition as a symbolic gesture, the likely impact on other initiatives and perception by other actors, and the likely effect on Ireland's ongoing influence on the issue. In addition, should I decide to recommend early recognition to the Government, then as an essentially symbolic action the timing of such a move would also be a matter of careful judgment.

I have not yet concluded that immediate recognition by Ireland would be a helpful step, but I keep this matter under continuous review, in the light of the views expressed by the Dáil and the Seanad in 2014. I intend to visit the region again early in the new year, and would expect that this issue will feature in my discussions with the various parties on that occasion.

**Northern Ireland**

38. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions he has had with civic groups in Northern Ireland regarding the need to have the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive restored; the outcome of such discussions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53164/17]

52. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of recent efforts to restore the Executive in Northern Ireland; the implications for Northern Ireland of the ongoing impasse in the context of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53144/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 38 and 52 together.

As a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, the Government, working with the British Government, has spared no effort in supporting and facilitating talks on the formation of a new Executive, over many months. However, devolved power-sharing government can only operate on the basis of an agreement reached between the two largest parties. The other parties represented in the Assembly also have a critical role to play.

I am disappointed that, after several phases of negotiations in different formats, we still do not have an agreement to form an Executive. The issues under discussion go to the heart of the divisions in society in Northern Ireland and agreement on them was always going to be challenging. However, I have always believed that it remains possible to reach an agreed outcome which ensures implementation of previous agreements and reflects the core principles of the Good Friday Agreement and power-sharing itself - partnership, equality, and mutual respect. It remains my conviction that this is achievable.

The continuing absence of devolved institutions in Northern Ireland and of the North South Ministerial Council is all the more serious at this time, when the challenges of the UK exit from the EU need to be addressed. This needs to be done in a manner which protects the Good Friday Agreement and all of the progress it has enabled us to make in securing the peace and deepening reconciliation between communities in Northern Ireland, between North and South, and between Ireland and Britain.

The power-sharing Executive and the Assembly are responsible for representing the interests of all of the people of Northern Ireland, including in relation to how the issues arising with the UK exit from the EU should be addressed. It is imperative that the devolved institutions can urgently operate again. The North South Ministerial Council must also resume its work to oversee and develop North/South co-operation, including that commenced last year to coordinate engagement by the Government and the Executive on dealing with the challenges raised on an all-island basis by the UK exit.

I maintain very regular engagement on behalf of the Government with civic society across all communities and regions in Northern Ireland. The Taoiseach and other Government Ministers also visit Northern Ireland on a regular basis and there is extensive engagement through the All-Island Civic Dialogue on Brexit. All of this engagement with civic society confirms our view that there is an urgent need and demand for the resumption of the devolved institutions.

The Government has consistently affirmed our unwavering commitment to the Good Friday Agreement, and our determination to secure the effective operation of all of its institutions. The Taoiseach and I continue to engage with the British Government and the parties in Northern Ireland to give full effect to that commitment.

The Government is also continuing to work intensively, as part of the EU27, to ensure the protection of the Good Friday Agreement through the Article 50 process. The negotiations over the last number of months saw a good political understanding develop on all sides of what is required to achieve what is a shared EU and UK objective. Last Friday, we received firm commitments in the joint report of the EU Task force and UK Government on the protection of the Good Friday Agreement in all of its parts, including in relation to North South co-operation and the principle of consent, on the avoidance of a hard border and on the maintenance of the Common Travel Area.

As the EU-UK negotiations proceed, the Government will continue to pursue, with our EU partners, an outcome to the Article 50 process that protects our headline priorities and Ireland's fundamental interests, including the protection of the Good Friday Agreement and the gains of the peace process.

*Question No. 39 answered orally.*

### **Human Trafficking**

40. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions he has had with European counterparts in regard to the ongoing reports of large scale human trafficking and slave auctions in Libya; and the position the government is taking in regard to this issue. [53231/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I strongly condemn all human rights violations and abuses against refugees and migrants in Libya, and I am absolutely appalled by reports of slave auctions. Political fragmentation in Libya has led to a governance vacuum in some areas, but I call on the Libyan authorities to do everything they can to end this horrendous practice.

The situation in Libya was discussed at the June 2017 Foreign Affairs Council, and at the July Council, my EU colleagues and I adopted Conclusions, which urged the Libyan authorities to improve access to, and conditions in, detention centres, as well as to look for alternatives to detention. At the European Council in October, the Taoiseach conveyed Ireland's deep concerns on the conditions in detention centres in Libya. He announced that Ireland will double its contribution to the EU Trust Fund for Africa to €6 million, to help address the root causes of migration.

The EU supports the UNHCR and the IOM efforts to ensure adequate reception facilities for migrants, and provides training in international humanitarian law, human rights and gender issues to the Libyan authorities. The African Union, EU and UN agreed in November to establish a trilateral Task Force to protect the lives of migrants, particularly inside Libya, by accelerating assisted voluntary returns to countries of origin, and resettlement of those needing international protection.

Real improvement in the situation of migrants in Libya will require political stabilisation and a return to order. Through the EU, Ireland supports both UN mediation, and regional efforts, to stabilise the situation in Libya.

The fight to reduce poverty is one of the main drivers of large irregular migratory flows, and remains firmly at the core of Ireland's aid programme. Irish Aid will continue to focus on ending extreme poverty, hunger and under-nutrition.

## EU Migration Crisis

41. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on recent European efforts to address the refugee crisis and the supports being provided by the Government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53146/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The EU has responded to the migration crisis by adopting a range of measures to deal with this mass movement of people. These have included engaging with countries of origin and transit to address the root causes of migration including through the Migration Partnership Framework; agreeing a plan to relocate migrants from Italy and Greece across the Union; the launching of an EU Naval Force, Operation Sophia, to disrupt people smuggling in the Mediterranean; and substantial financial assistance to countries hosting large numbers of migrants. EU Heads of State and Government concluded a landmark migration deal with Turkey in March 2016, which has resulted in a very substantial reduction in the number of migrants risking their lives at sea to enter the EU from Turkey. These measures are bearing fruit and the numbers of migrants risking their lives is down significantly on last year.

Most migrants to Europe originate in Africa and the EU Trust Fund for Africa, established in 2015, is tackling the root causes of instability, forced displacement and irregular migration. Almost €3.2 billion has been pledged by donors to the Fund for the period 2016 to 2020, with the Irish Government making a commitment of €6 million. The EU is also supporting the Turkey Refugee Facility, a response to the almost 3 million refugees being hosted in that country. €3 billion has been committed to the Facility by the EU for the period 2016 to 2019, with Ireland providing €22.9 m. The Irish Navy has also been deployed in the Mediterranean and has to date rescued over 17,500 people.

Last month, the EU and African Union held a Summit meeting at which they agreed to enhance cooperation on migration. They announced the creation of a joint African Union, EU and UN Task Force specifically focused on reversing the humanitarian emergency. The objectives of the Task Force are to save and protect the lives of migrants and refugees along key routes and in Libya, in particular; to accelerate assisted voluntary returns to countries of origin; and the resettlement of those in need of international protection.

Ireland has been helping to alleviate the suffering of migrants and refugees. In 2016, €194 million, more than one quarter of our ODA, was directed to humanitarian needs, including support for responses to refugee influxes. This year, Ireland is providing €25 million in humanitarian assistance to alleviate the effects on civilians of the conflict in Syria, €11 million for South Sudan, €6 million for Somalia, and €4 million for Yemen.

## Overseas Development Aid Expenditure

42. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if commitments will be made with regard to multi-annual funding for overseas development aid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53143/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** The Government is strongly committed to Ireland's overseas development cooperation programme and to its place at the heart of our foreign policy.

Predictable funding streams allow the effective planning of our assistance so that it can deliver maximum impact, and greatly assists the prudential management of the aid budget.



Multi-annual funding arrangements are the most commonly used mechanism to facilitate predictability of funding and, importantly, to allow the delivery of strategic goals.

In 2017, over almost €74 million or 80% of Irish Aid's civil society budget is governed multi-annual funding agreements. The Programme Grant, the largest civil society funding mechanism, runs from 2017 to 2021, and will provide approximately €53 million in funding per year to thirteen NGOs to deliver results. Only NGOs which reach a certain critical mass qualify for this mechanism: the next round of funding for other, smaller, NGO partners will increase the potential annual grant to assist these partners in achieving the scale required to qualify for Programme Grants.

While it is more challenging to provide multi-annual funding in the context of humanitarian emergencies, Ireland has committed to providing at least 20% of its humanitarian funding through multi-annual agreements.

Our bi-lateral programmes in Key Partner Countries are predominantly based on multi-annual strategies including indicative multi-annual funding commitments. We expect that this strong commitment to multi-annual funding will continue as Ireland progresses towards our 0.7% target by 2030.

It is the Government's intention that a new White Paper on development cooperation would be published next year, most probably in the summer. One of the issues which will be considered in that context would be how to most effectively plan on a multi-annual basis, with a view to better achieving results.

### **Catalan Referendum**

43. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the continued imprisonment of Vice President Oriol Junqueras and the Interior Minister of the former Catalan Government Joaquim Forn; his further views on the continued imprisonment of two civic leaders (details supplied); and if he will raise concerns regarding their continued detention with his Spanish counterpart. [53151/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I am aware that judicial proceedings are underway and as these are matters before the Courts, it would not be appropriate for me to comment.

We are all concerned about the crisis in Catalonia.

The resolution of the crisis needs to be within Spain's constitutional framework and through Spain's democratic institutions. It is for all Spaniards – all Catalans and all Spaniards – to shape their own constitutional and political arrangements, through their own democratic institutions and laws.

Elections have been called for 21 December in which all of the parties can participate and which will give all Catalans a voice.

I hope that after these elections, regional autonomy can be restored.

### **Human Rights**

44. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and

Trade if he will join the calls for an immediate halt to the use of violent tactics by the state in Honduras; and if he will condemn the human rights abuses that are being committed. [53161/17]

59. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the worrying and volatile situation in Honduras; his views on the violent tactics employed by State forces against persons in the aftermath of the recent contentious election (details supplied); and his plans to contact his Honduran counterpart to protest the actions of the State forces. [53150/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 44 and 59 together.

I am aware of the situation to which the Deputies refer, namely the violence which occurred during protests following general elections in Honduras, which took place on 26 November.

I condemn unreservedly any acts of intimidation or violence perpetrated against those seeking to peacefully demonstrate or defend their rights. In particular, I wish to condemn the loss of human life in recent days and to express my sincere condolences to the families of the victims.

I echo calls made by the spokesperson of the EU High Representative Federica Mogherini last week for calm and restraint in Honduras in the aftermath of the election.

It is imperative that all sides act responsibly and work together, using the legal mechanisms available to them to address any potential complaints of irregularity regarding the electoral process, and to avoid violence at all times.

The EU deployed an Election Observer Mission to Honduras in October, which consists of 22 long-term observers and 40 short-term observers. Facilitated by the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade, Ireland contributed one long-term observer and one short-term observer to that mission, the aim of which is to provide an independent public assessment of the election process.

I am pleased that Ireland was in a position to contribute to this vital work.

The EU Election Observation Mission released a statement last Thursday, 7 December regarding the post electoral situation, calling for fundamental freedoms to be respected and for violence to be avoided at all costs. The statement welcomed the openness expressed by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal of Honduras to address any challenges made to the election result. Crucially, the EU Election Observation Mission delegation is committed to remaining in Honduras and continuing its vital work to closely observe the election until the electoral process is fully concluded.

While Ireland does not have diplomatic representation in Honduras, officials of my Department do raise issues relating to the protection and defence of human rights in Honduras both at EU and UN level, including through direct contact with the EU Delegation in Tegucigalpa.

On my instruction, they will continue to do so in light of recent developments in the country.

Officials at my Department have also met with human rights defenders from Honduras, most recently in Dublin in October 2017, when the then upcoming elections were discussed in some detail.

Irish Aid, the Government's overseas development programme, contributes funding to programmes in Honduras through civil society organisations, chiefly Trócaire, including in support of its important work on human rights.

I can assure the Deputies that we will continue to monitor the situation in Honduras closely as the post electoral process progresses into its next stages.

### **Arms Trade**

45. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the petition signed by more than 22,000 persons highlighting the arms trade with the state of Israel presented to An Taoiseach by members of an organisation (details supplied) on 4 October 2017. [51490/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I am aware of the petition referenced by the Deputy, which was presented to the Taoiseach in October and has since been brought to my attention.

I am pleased to inform the House that Ireland does not have an arms industry and is not therefore an exporter of weapons to any country, other than a small amount of sporting guns. National legislation imposes a licensing requirement in respect of items on the EU Common Military List, including rifles and shotguns for sporting/hunting purposes. These applications are assessed on a case by case basis taking account of the EU Common Position, EU sanctions and the Arms Control Treaty. Licenses have also been granted for ‘dual use’ items, relating not to arms, but to components such as engine parts and to software. The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation is responsible for issuing licenses.

As regards the purchase of arms by Ireland from Israel, the acquisition of military equipment by the Defence Forces is the responsibility of the Department of Defence. I believe that the principal criterion used is the best equipment which can be obtained for the protection and operational effectiveness of Irish troops, and such equipment is often available from a limited number of sources.

### **Prison Accommodation Standards**

46. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the person or bodies he is engaging with on the ongoing issues of prisoners in Maghaberry Prison, Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53158/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Conditions in the prison form part of my regular discussions with political interlocutors in Northern Ireland, including the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who has certain responsibilities around the separated regime at the prison.

Deputies will be aware of my ongoing concerns about conditions in Maghaberry Prison. My officials at the Belfast Secretariat maintain regular contact with the Northern Ireland Office on this issue, as well as with the NI Department of Justice, the NI Prisoner Ombudsman, the Criminal Justice Inspectorate, the International Committee of the Red Cross’s Belfast office, the Northern Ireland Prison Service, the members of the Stocktake group, and other relevant agencies.

Primary responsibility for the conditions in Maghaberry rests with the Northern Ireland Department of Justice. The continued absence of a functioning Executive - and Minister for Justice - is a source of ongoing concern here. In that regard, the Government is continuing to work closely with the British Government to support the effective operation of the NI Executive



and all the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement.

### **Middle East Peace Process**

47. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if Ireland supports the current efforts to reconcile the political parties in Palestine and be a voice in ensuring respect for the results of democratic elections when they occur. [53160/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Government has for many years consistently supported the objective of Palestinian reconciliation, and worked at EU level to ensure that the EU also recognised the importance and potential of this process. The EU has consistently endorsed reconciliation in successive Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions on the conflict.

Differences and sometimes outright conflict between the disparate Palestinian groups, and in particular the two main organisations, Fatah and Hamas, has obviously weakened the position of the Palestinian people in addressing the problems that surround them. Conversely, reconciliation could be an essential step in allowing Palestinians to speak with one voice and to negotiate and to deliver on a peace agreement with Israel which would end the occupation. It could also be crucial to the task, with which we are familiar in relation to our own peace process, of helping bring former militants to support political process to address their grievances.

In saying this I am fully conscious of continuing problems with the positions, methods and aims of Hamas. I am also aware of more moderate signals they have given, including of accepting the lead of President Abbas as negotiating on behalf of the Palestinian people, and in pursuit of his objective of a two state solution. How or whether these divergent impulses can be resolved within Hamas is still to be proven, but the effort is surely one worth making.

Although the contrary is often asserted, it is not the case that the European Union, or for that matter the United States, refused to accept the results of the 2006 Palestinian elections. Both parties recognised as legitimate the Palestinian Government subsequently formed by Hamas, but they also exercised their own right to decide whether or in what form to engage directly with members of Hamas while it remained committed to an armed struggle.

I would be happy to urge support for any Palestinian Government which was committed to the peaceful achievement of a two state solution.

### **Syrian Conflict**

48. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to advocate at the EU Foreign Affairs Council for the lifting of the EU's economic sanctions against Syria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53156/17]

56. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to contact the US Ambassador to raise the issue of lifting the United States' economic sanctions against Syria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53157/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 48 and 56 together.

Sanctions are a tool which the international community may use to put political pressure on those who commit violence against their own people. In the case of Syria, the EU sanctions

include an oil embargo, restrictions on investments, a freeze of Syrian Central Bank assets and export restrictions on equipment and technology that might be used for internal repression, or for interception of internet or telephone communications. There are no sanctions on food, medicines or most other civilian goods.

In addition to these measures, targeted EU sanctions are in place against over 250 people and almost 70 entities which are complicit in the violent repression of the civilian population in Syria. The first person on this list is Bashar Al Assad, whose forces have been responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people.

The EU's Basic Principles on the Use of Restrictive Measures, state that "Sanctions should be targeted in a way that has maximum impact on those whose behaviour we want to influence. Targeting should reduce to the maximum extent possible any adverse humanitarian effects or unintended consequences for persons not targeted ...." Accordingly, the EU's Syria sanctions include specific exemptions for essential civilian needs and for humanitarian assistance. The EU keeps the impact of sanctions under constant review, and will consider options to mitigate any unintended consequences which can be documented as relating directly to the measures themselves, as distinct from the more general economic disruption caused by the conflict and the Assad regime's actions.

In line with the EU strategy on Syria, the EU will maintain its restrictive measures against the Syrian regime and its supporters as long as the repression of civilians continues.

Ireland has consistently supported EU sanctions targeting the Assad regime and its supporters, and will continue to do so as long as the situation on the ground justifies these measures. To lift these sanctions would amount to tacit support for the Assad regime and would serve to encourage further impunity with regard to attacks on civilians, and disregard for the UN-led peace process.

Some of the US measures pre-date the current conflict. However, I understand that the aims of the sanctions that the US has imposed since 2011 include depriving the regime of the resources it needs to continue violence against civilians, and this is a goal shared by the EU.

### **Brexit Negotiations**

49. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he continues to liaise with his EU colleagues and the UK Government in the context of ongoing negotiations in respect of Brexit; if he has been assured that the UK government continues to ensure that the DUP is briefed on progress; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53168/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The remarkable solidarity of our EU partners regarding the unique challenges facing the island of Ireland has been strong and consistent throughout the first phase of the EU-UK exit negotiations. I am very pleased with the progress so far in the negotiations and we reached a key moment last Friday when we achieved the goals we set out to achieve in phase one. This includes maintenance of the Common Travel Area, and the protection of the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts including North/South cooperation.

Ireland is negotiating as part of the EU27, through the work of the EU's Chief Negotiator, Michel Barnier and his team. My officials are in regular contact with Mr Barnier's team and provide all support they can to the work of the Task force in the negotiations, particularly where it concerns the Irish-specific issues, which will continue to be taken forward in a distinct strand

of the negotiations in phase two.

In the lead up to Friday's publication of the joint progress report by the EU and UK negotiating teams and ahead of the European Council decision on sufficient progress, I undertook an intensive round of bilateral contacts with my EU counterparts, to reaffirm the importance of making sufficient progress across all three exit issues, including the Irish-specific issues. I met with Michel Barnier again in Brussels on 24 November and also met with my counterparts from Poland, Hungary and Spain on the same day, in the margins of the Eastern Partnership Summit. I have spoken to a number of my counterparts by telephone over the past week, including with my colleagues from Germany, Luxembourg, Belgium, Portugal and Slovakia. I also joined the Taoiseach in his meeting with the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, in Dublin on Friday 1 December. There has also been extensive engagement with EU partners by Minister of State McEntee and at official level. These strategic engagements will continue as the Brexit negotiations move into phase 2.

My most recent meeting with a UK minister was with Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson. While we had a broad agenda, it provided the opportunity to exchange views on the exit negotiations. The Taoiseach and my cabinet colleagues engage regularly with our UK counterparts on a range of issues unrelated to Brexit, but have used these opportunities to restate the EU position on the negotiations and to reaffirm that the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the EU are through the agreed structures in Brussels.

One of the key priorities of the Government in these negotiations has been to ensure that the gains of the peace process and the Good Friday Agreement are fully protected. This is a shared objective of the EU and of the UK. Ireland is negotiating as part of the EU27. Any internal consultations on the UK's position in the Article 50 negotiations are a matter for the UK Government.

I am very pleased that the EU Task Force was able to reach this agreement with the UK government last Friday and that Michel Barnier was in a position to recommend to the Council that sufficient progress has been made on all phase one issues. Language on Ireland and Northern Ireland in the joint report from the negotiators of the EU and the UK Government reflects our goals of maintaining the Common Travel Area, protecting the Good Friday Agreement and North South cooperation, and protecting EU citizenship and other rights. I am hopeful that the European Council will agree to start discussions on the framework for a future EU-UK relationship as soon as possible. The Government will keep working to achieve the best possible outcome for the island of Ireland, our citizens and our economy.

### **Middle East Issues**

50. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the conversations he has had with President Trump or the US Administration since the President's decision to officially recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53229/17]

54. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the specific actions the Government will take in view of President Trump's decision to declare Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and in view of the escalation of illegal settlement activity, forced displacement and demolition of Palestinian villages in Area C; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53142/17]

60. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and

Trade if, further to Prime Minister Netanyahu's appearance at the Foreign Ministers' meeting on 11 December 2017 and his intention to justify illegal settlements in Palestine, he will condemn this illegal activity, in view of President Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. [53162/17]

61. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the further action the European Union is considering taking with regard to the recent recognition of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital by the US government; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53232/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 50, 54, 60 and 61 together.

In relation to the announcement by the United States in relation to Jerusalem, I refer Deputies to my earlier reply to Priority Question no 28.

I was in direct contact with the US authorities to express my concerns before this decision was taken, and I issued a public statement of the Government's response and views when the announcement was made. Subsequently, US diplomats have contacted my Department at senior official level, as well as in other capitals, to explain the perspective of the US Government in taking this action. My officials in turn underlined the deep concerns which I expressed in my statement.

The European Union, as well as Ireland and many other Member States, have clearly expressed their concerns about, and disagreement with, the decision of the United States, and have restated our own policy that Jerusalem must become the capital of two states, Israel and Palestine. This position remains unchanged.

The expansion of Israeli settlements, and related policies of dispossession, demolitions and evictions, have been central to Ireland's concerns on the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) for some years. I have stressed these issues at EU level in discussions at the Foreign Affairs Council and directly in our contacts with the Israeli authorities. I made a public statement condemning the settlement process on 20 October last. I have also advised the House from time to time on actions taken by my officials in relation to specific communities under threat in the occupied territory. Most recently, I expressed Ireland's concerns in relation to settlements again directly to Prime Minister Netanyahu at an informal EU breakfast meeting with him in Brussels on Monday.

## **EU Migration Crisis**

51. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the way in which the EU trust fund is addressing the root causes of migration in view of the fact Ireland has doubled its contributions. [53159/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** The aim of the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa is to tackle the root causes of instability, forced displacement and irregular migration. The Trust Fund is assisting a band of countries across three regions in Africa that are among the most fragile and affected by migration, namely the Horn of Africa, the Sahel/Lake Chad region, and North Africa.

Almost €3.2 billion has been pledged by donors for the Trust Fund for the period 2016 to 2020, with 117 programmes across the three regions ongoing and total disbursements to date amounting to over €488 million. Ireland made an initial commitment of €3 million to the Trust

Fund, earmarked for the Horn of Africa, and an additional €3 million was recently pledged in response to growing needs. Ireland's total €6 million contribution covers the period 2016-20.

The Trust Fund is tackling the root causes of irregular migration and displacement in countries of origin, transit and destination through a range of interventions. First, employment opportunities are being created through economic programmes, especially for young people and women in local communities - with a focus on vocational training and the creation of small enterprises.

Secondly, basic services for local populations, such as in health and education, are being supported, in particular for the most vulnerable as well as refugees and displaced persons. Thirdly, better management of migration is being assisted so as to enable regions and countries to contain and prevent irregular migration, fight human trafficking, enable effective return and re-admission, and support international protection and asylum.

Finally, the Trust Fund is supporting improvements in overall governance, in particular by promoting conflict prevention, addressing human rights abuses, enforcing the rule of law, and countering radicalisation and extremism.

In all of these ways, the EU Trust Fund is delivering an integrated and co-ordinated approach in response to the diverse causes of irregular migration in Africa, and I am glad to note that the recent African Union – European Union Summit agreed to further cooperation in that regard.

*Question No. 52 answered with Question No. 38.*

### **Humanitarian Aid Provision**

53. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the UN's record appeal for \$22.5 billion to help victims of conflict and humanitarian crises around the world (details supplied); and the way in which his Department will respond to this record appeal. [53149/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** I am aware of the UN's appeal and the massive humanitarian need that exists in the world today. The pace at which the need is increasing is very worrying and presents an enormous challenge for the global response.

Ireland's Overseas Development Aid (ODA) budget has consistently supported responses to humanitarian crises. In 2016, €194 million, more than one quarter of our ODA, was directed to humanitarian responses.

This year, significant humanitarian funding continues to be provided in response to global need, and I would anticipate that by year-end around one quarter of Ireland's ODA will again have been disbursed in direct response to crisis and conflict. Among the examples of our response this year are €25 million in humanitarian assistance to alleviate the effects on civilians of the conflict in Syria, €11 million for South Sudan, €6 million for Somalia, and €4 million for Yemen.

For 2018, the Government has allocated just over €707 million for ODA, the third consecutive annual increase, and humanitarian funding levels similar to those in 2017 have been provisionally allocated for 2018, including through our EU and UN contributions.



Ireland is also actively engaged in ensuring that the effectiveness of the international humanitarian system is improved, through implementing the commitments of the World Humanitarian Summit and the Grand Bargain, and supporting UN reform. The Grand Bargain is an agreement among 30 donors, including Ireland, to amongst other things deliver an extra US\$1 billion in aid by 2020 through improved working practices. In 2018, we will continue to pursue this through, for example, our membership of the UN CERF (Central Emergency Response Fund) Advisory Board and the WFP Executive Board.

However, as well as supporting humanitarian response, we recognise that tackling the factors driving humanitarian need is the only way to ultimately end it. Through our multilateral and bilateral engagements, this Government remains committed to addressing the causes of humanitarian need, in particular through supporting conflict resolution and through our consistent investment in development, in particular but not exclusively in Ireland's key partner countries.

*Question No. 54 answered with Question No. 50.*

### **Passport Applications Data**

**55. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report to Dáil Éireann on the backlog of passport applications to be processed; the number of persons with dual UK and Irish citizenship applying for an Irish passport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53039/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Between 1 January and December 7 this year, the Passport Service received 781,716 passport applications, which represents a 12.4% increase over the same period last year. There are currently 29,652 applications in progress. These are applications that are going through the normal checking process rather than a backlog.

While the volume of applications in progress remains high, the turnaround time for applications submitted through Passport Express for first-time applications, renewal applications and applications for renewal of lost, stolen or damaged passports remains at 15 working days. Applications received through Online Passport Application Service can be processed more quickly, with current turnaround times of approximately 5 working days.

The fact that target turnaround times for Passport Express renewal and first-time applications are being met despite the significant increases in volumes of applications in the year reflects the hard work and professionalism of Passport Service staff. Service improvements, such as the introduction of the Online Passport Application Service that launched this year, have also made a major contribution to the effective management of these exceptionally high volumes.

Tracking of applications is in general carried out against method of application. The Passport Service does not compile data on any other citizenships that an applicant may hold. In order to meet the requirements of the Passports Act 2008, each applicant must demonstrate an entitlement to Irish citizenship in their application. Entitlement to Irish citizenship is governed by Irish law and in particular, the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. Irish citizens are not prohibited from holding foreign citizenship in addition to their Irish citizenship.

For the period January 1 to December 4 this year, the number of passport applications received from applicants living in Great Britain was 66,054, with 69,094 coming from applicants living in Northern Ireland. This compares with figures of 48,765 and 61,104 respectively for the same period in 2016. My Department continues to closely monitor the level of passport demand to ensure that all resources, including staffing, are effectively deployed.

*Question No. 56 answered with Question No. 48.*

## **Economic Sanctions**

57. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if a review of the effectiveness and utility of economic sanctions placed on other states as a tool of coercive diplomacy is under way or planned by his Department. [53197/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Restrictive measures, also referred to as ‘sanctions’, are legally binding measures which may be taken against individuals, entities or countries. Such measures can cover a variety of elements including financial services (e.g. asset freezes), immigration (visa and travel bans) and trade (e.g. export restrictions).

The objective in adopting sanctions is to bring about a change in policy and/ or behaviour by the target of the measures. For example sanctions may be applied in response to repression, human rights abuses or violations of international law. As such, sanctions are an important foreign policy tool and a part of an integrated and comprehensive approach to the pursuit of foreign policy objectives including safeguarding security and preserving peace, conflict prevention, and the support of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and international law.

Sanctions adopted by the United Nations Security Council are binding on all United Nations Member States. They are subject to EU measures in order to ensure their consistent implementation throughout the EU. The EU may also adopt its own sanctions, known as autonomous EU measures, as a tool of its Common Foreign and Security Policy.

These sanctions are targeted to minimise the consequences for those not responsible for the actions that have triggered them, e.g. the local civilian population. For example, economic sanctions often take the form of asset freezes for targeted individuals rather than blanket economic restrictions on a country. A key principle of EU sanctions is that they must respect fundamental human rights and fundamental freedoms, with a particular emphasis on the right to due process. In addition, where appropriate, EU sanctions regimes include exemptions and derogations to ensure mitigation of any unintended humanitarian consequences.

Restrictive measures in force are kept under constant review to ensure that they continue to contribute towards achieving their stated objectives. Ireland engages fully in this process at EU level.

## **Brexit Negotiations**

58. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions he has had with civic groups in Northern Ireland regarding the Brexit negotiations; the outcome of such discussions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53163/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I am acutely aware of the importance of engaging with civic groups in Northern Ireland in the context of the ongoing EU – UK exit negotiations. I maintain regular engagement on behalf of the Government with civic society across all communities and regions in Northern Ireland. The Taoiseach and other Government Ministers also visit Northern Ireland on a regular basis.

I have most recently had the opportunity to discuss the impact of Brexit with civil society groups during my visit to Belfast on 22 November. This and other visits provide the opportu-

nity to discuss concerns regarding the impact of Brexit on lives and livelihoods across Northern Ireland and I will be continuing this engagement in the period ahead.

In addition, many civil society organisations in Northern Ireland continue to participate in the All-Island Civic Dialogue process. The All-Island Civic Dialogue was launched in November 2016 in order to have the widest possible conversation with civil society groups, trade unions, business groups, non-governmental organisations and political parties across the island of Ireland. Since then, three plenary dialogues and twenty sectoral dialogues have taken place in locations across the country to discuss the impact of Brexit on specific areas including agrifood, Transport, Energy, Tourism and Hospitality and Education. The most recent sectoral dialogue on energy took place in Dublin on October 26. These dialogue meetings have enjoyed strong participation from civil society groups, North and South.

At the last plenary meeting of the All-Island Civic Dialogue in September of this year, Northern Ireland and the Good Friday Agreement was the principal focus of a session on citizens. This session highlighted that there is a need for politics and civil society to come together and discuss the cross-community impact of the UK's decision to leave the EU. The overwhelming message was that, in discussions around Northern Ireland and Brexit, protecting and developing the gains of the peace process must be the main priority. This is reflected in both the Government and EU position on Northern Ireland in protecting the hard won gains of the peace process and avoiding border infrastructure of any kind on this island.

In this regard, we are pleased with the agreement that was reached between PM May and President Juncker last Friday which represents significant progress for Ireland's priorities in the EU-UK negotiations. This includes maintaining the Common Travel Area, protecting the Good Friday Agreement and North South cooperation, and protection of EU citizenship and other rights. I sincerely hope that the European Council will make the decision tomorrow to move to phase two of the negotiations. The Government will continue its work on Irish-specific issues in a distinct strand of phase two of the negotiations as part of the EU27.

I will continue engagement with civil society groups North and South as the negotiations progress.

*Question No. 59 answered with Question No. 44.*

*Questions Nos. 60 and 61 answered with Question No. 50.*

### **Official Engagements**

62. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the contacts he has made with African governments regarding An Taoiseach's cancelled visit to west Africa. [51724/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** The Taoiseach was due to travel to West Africa between 25 November and 1 December, to visit Irish Defence Forces personnel based in Mali and to attend the African Union - European Union Summit in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, from 25 November to 1 December. However, due to domestic political developments, it was necessary to cancel this visit.

Ireland was represented at the Summit by the Irish Ambassador to the African Union, accompanied by the Ambassador to Côte d'Ivoire (based in Abuja), and the Africa Director of my Department.

Formal notifications indicating that the Taoiseach would not be in a position to travel were issued through relevant diplomatic channels to the authorities in Côte d'Ivoire, as hosts of the Summit, and, separately, to the authorities in Mali.

### **Brexit Issues**

63. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if consideration has been given to the need for new formal structures for dialogue to be established between the Irish and British Governments in view of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53145/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Government has been clear in its view that we do not want the United Kingdom to leave the EU, but ultimately that is a decision for the people of the United Kingdom and we respect the democratic outcome of the referendum in June of last year.

However, Ireland maintains a strong and constructive bilateral relationship with the United Kingdom and we are committed to developing and enhancing this. We will also work to secure the closest possible positive relationship between the UK and the European Union.

There are already a number of channels for ongoing dialogue and cooperation between the Irish and British governments, which will continue after the UK leaves the European Union. In this regard, the Good Friday Agreement provides for important institutional co-operation on an east-west basis through the British-Irish Inter-Governmental Conference (BIIGC) and the British Irish Council (BIC). In addition, the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA) brings together elected representatives from the Oireachtas, Westminster, the Northern Ireland Assembly, and the Scottish and Welsh devolved assemblies.

These structures have shown their value and will continue to evolve in response to the changing circumstances. The British Irish Council continues to work on areas of shared importance, with the Taoiseach and Minister McHugh attending the most recent British Irish Council Summit meeting in Jersey in November. Three of the four British Irish Parliamentary Assembly Committees carried out inquiries into the consequences of the UK exit from the EU for various sectors across this island, meeting with practitioners and stakeholders to hear evidence and further the discourse around this issue of primary importance.

Other channels of contact and cooperation have developed over the years as the relationship between these islands has grown closer. For example, in 2012, a process was established involving summits between the Taoiseach and the UK Prime Minister, supported by a Joint Work Programme managed at official level by the heads of all government departments in both London and Dublin.

Deputies will also be aware of ongoing contact between Government Ministers and their UK counterparts across a range of policy areas. I recently welcomed Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson to Dublin where, in addition to Brexit, we had the opportunity to discuss a number of areas of mutual foreign policy interest.

I am therefore confident that existing structures will provide ample opportunity for positive dialogue between our two Governments.

### **Northern Ireland**

64. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will raise with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland the ongoing incarceration of a person (details supplied) who had their licence revoked in March 2016 but has not received due process or opportunity to answer charges against them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53233/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I am aware of the case to which the Deputy refers and my officials in the Belfast Secretariat monitor this and other cases as part of their ongoing work on prison issues generally in Northern Ireland.

The person concerned was detained in March 2016 when the release licence granted to him under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement was revoked by the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Theresa Villiers. The case has been raised with the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) by my officials. It also has also been the subject of representations to the NIO by various public representatives in Northern Ireland.

As part of the revocation process, the independent Northern Ireland Parole Commissioners carry out a full review of the case. The Parole Commissioners are charged with taking into account the obligations on the State of the European Convention on Human Rights in making their recommendation. This includes assessing the risk to the public should the person remain at liberty. Those whose licence is revoked under this process are provided with a copy of the independent Parole Commissioners recommendation, which sets out the reasons the licence was revoked.

I understand that a Parole Commissioners hearing was held in June and made a decision to uphold the revocation of this person's license.

A senior official from the Secretariat visited the individual in question in Maghaberry prison in July, at his request and we are aware of his concerns. My officials will continue to actively monitor the case.

### **Brexit Issues**

65. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if analysis has been conducted regarding the designation of Northern Ireland as a special economic zone, including maintaining ongoing connectivity with the European Union. [50016/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Government's focus in relation to Northern Ireland in the context of the EU-UK exit negotiations is the substantive outcome on each of the key issues, rather than on the label ascribed to the overall package. Our priority has always been to ensure that the gains of the peace process and the achievements of the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts, including avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland, are not harmed by the UK's exit from the European Union. This objective is shared by our EU partners, the UK Government and the parties in Northern Ireland.

We welcome the joint report of the negotiators of the EU and the UK and, in that regard, we have secured an important commitment from the UK and EU. Crucially, the UK has reiterated that there will be no physical border infrastructure or related checks on the island of Ireland and sets out in detail how this can be achieved. We have a stated commitment from the UK to maintain full alignment with those rules of the Internal Market and Customs Union which, now or in the future, support North-South co-operation, the all-island economy and the protection of the Good Friday Agreement.



The Government has always said that we would see the UK as a whole staying in the single market and the Customs Union as the best possible outcome for Northern Ireland and for East-West trade. The joint report spells out the UK's intention to avoid any hard border through a comprehensive future EU-UK relationship.

I am satisfied, therefore that in all eventualities, a hard border will be avoided and North South cooperation protected. This is something that every political party on our island supports. There is a great deal of work still to be done on the Irish-specific issues in order to ensure that all of the commitments set out in the joint report are implemented. I am therefore pleased that work on Irish issues will continue to be taken forward in a distinct strand of the EU-UK negotiations in phase two. This will ensure that they will not be overlooked in the next phase.

It is for these reasons that I hope that the European Council meeting this week in Brussels will agree that sufficient progress has been made in phase one of the negotiations, and that discussions can now commence on a future EU-UK relationship and any transitional arrangements.

### **Dublin-Monaghan Bombings**

66. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the ongoing outstanding requests with the British Government regarding inquiries into the Dublin and Monaghan bombings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53130/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I acknowledge at the outset those across the House who work on a cross-party basis with the Government on this issue and the tireless efforts of Justice for the Forgotten. Dealing with long-outstanding issues relating to the legacy of the conflict in Northern Ireland are of the utmost importance to the Government. The Programme for a Partnership Government highlights this priority, with specific reference to implementation of the All-Party Dáil motions relating to the Dublin Monaghan bombings.

The All-Party motion on the 1974 Dublin Monaghan bombings that was adopted by the Dáil on 25 May 2016 has, like those adopted in 2008 and 2011, been conveyed to the British Government. These motions call on the British Government to allow access by an independent, international judicial figure to all original documents relating to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, as well as the Dublin bombings of 1972 and 1973, the bombing of Kay's Tavern in Dundalk and the murder of Seamus Ludlow. The Government is committed to actively pursuing the implementation of these all-Party Dáil motions, and has consistently raised the issue with the British Government. I have spoken directly with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, James Brokenshire, about this matter and am actively engaged with the British Government on an ongoing basis on this issue, as are officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

As part of this engagement, the Government underlines that the Dáil motions represent the consensus political view in Ireland that an independent, international judicial review of all the relevant documents is required to establish the full facts of the Dublin Monaghan atrocities. I have also advised the Secretary of State that the absence of a response from the British Government is of deep concern to the Government and indeed this House, and I have emphasised the urgent need for a response from the British Government.

The Government will continue to engage with the British Government on the request in

relation to the Dublin-Monaghan bombings, and pursue all possible avenues that could achieve progress on this issue, consistent with the request made by this House.

### Brexit Documents

67. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the difference between regulatory divergence and mainlining full alignment as described in the final draft of the EU-UK deal. [52887/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The agreement reached last Friday between the EU task force and the UK Government contains a commitment from the UK to protect North South co-operation, as well as its guarantee of avoiding a hard border.

In the event that it is not possible to resolve the border issue as part of a wider EU-UK future relationship agreement, which has always been the Irish Government's preference, or through specific solutions, paragraph 49 of the report states spells out that, "in the absence of agreed solutions, the United Kingdom will maintain full alignment with those rules of the Internal Market and the Customs Union which, now or in the future, support North-South cooperation, the all-island economy and the protection of the 1998 agreement."

It has also been agreed that any agreements put in place will be accompanied by effective mechanisms to ensure implementation and oversight. This is an important fail safe, recognising that to avoid a hard border, no matter how it is achieved, Northern Ireland or the UK as a whole will need to remain fully aligned with necessary rules of the Customs Union and the Single Market.

"Alignment" is a term used in EU law in the context of adherence to the *acquis communautaire*. A hard border is not necessary today because Northern Ireland and Ireland are fully aligned with the *acquis communautaire* or EU rules. To "maintain full alignment" therefore requires the UK to continue to adhere to all elements of EU Internal Market and Customs Union law which supports the fundamentally important goals set out above. This will have to continue to be the case unless and until such time as there is an alternative solution in place that can continue to meet our shared goal of avoiding a hard border. I am satisfied by this firm commitment from the UK.

In the next phase, the EU will work with the UK to ensure that, under all eventualities, a hard border is avoided. The Government will continue to support the EU Task force in this work.

### Departmental Reviews

68. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Taoiseach the terms of reference of the review of the Department of Justice and Equality's handling of the trawl of emails relating to the Disclosures Tribunal; and if the failure to search the former Minister's email account and the accounts of her advisers will be included in the terms of reference of the review. [53497/17]

**The Taoiseach:** The terms of reference for the review referred to are available on my Department's website, [www.taoiseach.gov.ie](http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie). The terms of reference include an examination of the actions taken by the Department of Justice and Equality in response to all requests for documents directed to the Department, including whether the Department has now carried out

appropriately comprehensive search and retrieval to identify any relevant material for the tribunal and any concerns which arise. The review may also advise on what further measures, if any, might be taken to address those concerns. The Department of Justice and Equality will of course implement any further measures arising from the review.

### **Good Friday Agreement**

69. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has had discussions with his British counterpart on the legislation being enacted or proposed by the British Government regarding its decision to exit the European Union; and if he has satisfied himself that such legislation does not impact on aspects of the Good Friday Agreement. [52941/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Government is determined to ensure that the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts is fully protected and respected in the context of the UK's withdrawal from the EU and this has been a headline priority since the UK referendum result. As co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, the Government has a solemn responsibility to protect the Agreement in all its parts and the gains of the Peace Process which have been of immeasurable benefit to the entire island, north and south.

Upholding the Good Friday Agreement is also an objective shared by the British Government. Last Friday, we received firm commitments in the joint report of the negotiators of the EU and UK Government. These commitments include the maintenance of the Common Travel Area, protection of EU citizenship and other rights, and the protection of the Good Friday Agreement in all of its parts including in relation to North South co-operation and the principle of consent.

This agreement not only provides a guarantee that there will be no hard border in any circumstances, it spells out for the first time how this will be achieved. In the event that it is not possible to resolve the border issue as part of a wider EU-UK future relationship agreement, which has always been the Irish Government's preference, or through specific solutions, paragraph 49 of the report states that, "in the absence of agreed solutions, the United Kingdom will maintain full alignment with those rules of the Internal Market and the Customs Union which, now or in the future, support North-South co-operation, the all-island economy and the protection of the 1998 agreement." It has also been agreed that any agreements put in place will be accompanied by effective mechanisms to ensure implementation and oversight.

The British Government has proposed a number of pieces of draft legislation relating to the UK's Withdrawal from the European Union, which are being considered at Westminster. While this is a matter for the UK Parliament, my Department, including through the Embassy in London, is actively following the progress of these bills at Westminster.

### **Ministerial Meetings**

70. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to meet the NATO Secretary General. [53354/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I currently have no plans to meet with NATO's Secretary General, Mr. Jens Stoltenberg.

## **Foreign Conflicts**

71. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the efforts being made to encourage the international community to take action against the government of Myanmar in view of the recent escalation of violence in Rakhine State, Myanmar; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53376/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I continue to have deep concerns about the violence and human rights abuses in Rakhine State and I have condemned the excessive actions of the Myanmar security forces on numerous occasions since 25 August. Ireland has consistently expressed our concern at EU level and with our international partners.

A devastating humanitarian crisis has developed as a result of these actions in Rakhine State, and over 640,000 people, most of whom are members of the Rohingya community, have fled to Bangladesh where they are facing extremely challenging circumstances.

There are wide-ranging efforts being made at national, EU and the wider international levels to address the situation. At a political level, Ireland and the EU continue to address this crisis in line with the Conclusions setting out the EU's position on the situation in Myanmar which were adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council on 16 October.

Minister of State Ciarán Cannon visited Myanmar from 19-21 November 2017 to represent Ireland at a meeting of Asian and European foreign ministers in the ASEM format, which in addition to allowing broader discussions, offered an opportunity for ministers to express their concern on the situation in Rakhine state.

Minister of State Cannon directly conveyed Ireland's serious concerns in a bilateral meeting with Myanmar's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, U Kyaw Tin. He urged the Government of Myanmar to implement the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State in full and to allow the safe, voluntary and sustainable return of the people that have fled their homes.

While there, he also met with a range of Government, UN and civil society organisations to learn at first hand of the work they are doing and the challenges they face.

Ireland has also continued to engage on this issue at the United Nations and was an active participant in the Special Session of the Human Rights Council that took place in Geneva on 5 December, where Ireland's Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva outlined our concerns. At that session, Ireland supported a resolution expressing alarm and grave concern at the situation and calling on the Myanmar government to ensure the protection of the human rights of all persons in Myanmar, including persons belonging to the Rohingya Muslim community and other minorities.

Ireland will continue to engage at a national level, through our EU membership and with the broader international community to press for a positive and long-term solution to the situation in Rakhine State, including for the Rohingya community, and for the significant number of refugees who are now situated in Bangladesh.

## **Passport Applications Data**

72. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of Irish passport applications made, by country, in tabular form; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [53405/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Tracking of passport applications is in general carried out against channel of application rather than by other metrics, including country of origin. Bearing this in mind, the following general breakdown of applications will give the available detail on the volume of overseas applications received to date this year.

From 1 January 2017 to date, the Passport Service has received 585,798 applications from citizens resident in Ireland and 69,887 applications from citizens resident in Northern Ireland. In the same time period, the Passport Service has received a total of at least 126,031 passport applications from citizens residing outside of the island of Ireland.

Passport applications from persons outside the island of Ireland may be submitted either via the online passport renewal service at <https://www.dfa.ie/passportonline> or through the network of Irish Embassies and Consulates worldwide and a separate table is included below for the applications made through each of these channels.

In the case of table 1 (overseas applications via the online system), a breakdown is included based on the applicant's postal address.

In the case of table 2 (overseas applications via the Embassy network), it is not possible to provide a clear breakdown by country of residence of the applicant, because many Irish Embassies are accredited to and provide passport services for Irish citizens in more than one country. An indicative breakdown by receiving mission is included, although it should be noted that it is not necessarily the case that passport applications would have been received from each accredited State.

*Table 1: applications from outside the island of Ireland submitted to date in 2017 via the online renewal service*

Online applications by postal address of applicant	Applications received
AFGHANISTAN	2
ALGERIA	2
ANDORRA	1
ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA	1
ARGENTINA	28
ARUBA	1
AUSTRALIA	2,369
AUSTRIA	55
BAHAMAS	1
BAHRAIN	13
BANGLADESH	2
BARBADOS	4
BELARUS	2
BELGIUM	143
BELIZE	1
BERMUDA	11
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	1
BOTSWANA	1
BRAZIL	32



*Questions - Written Answers*

Online applications by postal address of applicant	Applications received
BRUNEI DARUSSALAM	2
BULGARIA	11
CAMBODIA	5
CAMEROON	1
CANADA	957
CANARY ISLANDS	10
CAYMAN ISLANDS	28
CHILE	10
CHINA	45
COLOMBIA	8
COOK ISLANDS	2
COSTA RICA	3
CROATIA	4
CYPRUS	13
CZECH REPUBLIC	35
DENMARK	56
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	2
EAST TIMOR	1
ECUADOR	2
EGYPT	20
ERITREA	1
ESTONIA	5
FALKLAND ISLANDS	1
FIJI	2
FINLAND	26
FRANCE	457
GEORGIA	2
GERMANY	464
GHANA	1
GIBRALTAR	7
GREECE	26
GUERNSEY	13
HONDURAS	1
HONG KONG SAR	58
HUNGARY	17
ICELAND	2
INDIA	20
INDONESIA	7
IRAN, ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF	1
ISLE OF MAN	36
ISRAEL	35
ITALY	139
JAPAN	58
JORDAN	5

Online applications by postal address of applicant	Applications received
KENYA	9
KOSOVO	1
KUWAIT	4
LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC	2
LATVIA	3
LEBANON	3
LIBYA	2
LUXEMBOURG	71
MACAU SAR	3
MALAWI	2
MALAYSIA	22
MALTA	20
MARTINIQUE	1
MAURITIUS	8
MEXICO	31
MONACO	4
MOROCCO	1
MOZAMBIQUE	1
MYANMAR	1
NEPAL	1
NETHERLANDS	267
NEW ZEALAND	577
NICARAGUA	1
NIGERIA	12
NORWAY	46
OMAN	2
PAKISTAN	2
PANAMA	6
PAPUA NEW GUINEA	1
PERU	14
PHILIPPINES	5
PITCAIRN ISLANDS	1
POLAND	19
PORTUGAL	45
PUERTO RICO	2
QATAR	15
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH SUDAN	1
ROMANIA	7
RUSSIA	7
RWANDA	1
SAUDI ARABIA	18
SEYCHELLES	1
SINGAPORE	91
SLOVAK REPUBLIC	5

Online applications by postal address of applicant	Applications received
SLOVENIA	2
SOUTH AFRICA	683
REPUBLIC OF KOREA	19
SPAIN	601
SRI LANKA	4
SUDAN	2
SWAZILAND	2
SWEDEN	106
SWITZERLAND	184
SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC	3
TAIWAN, PROVINCE OF CHINA	13
THAILAND	42
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO	6
TURKEY	26
TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS	2
UGANDA	4
UKRAINE	2
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	171
UNITED KINGDOM	16,669
UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA	5
UNITED STATES	3,685
URUGUAY	2
VATICAN CITY STATE	1
VENEZUELA	2
VIETNAM	32
VIRGIN ISLANDS (BRITISH)	1
VIRGIN ISLANDS (U.S)	1
ZAMBIA	5
ZIMBABWE	7
TOTAL	28,887

Table 2: indicative list of applications submitted to date in 2017 via Irish Embassies and Consulates\*

\*Note: Many Irish Embassies are accredited to and provide passport services for Irish citizens in more than one country. The following table is organised by receiving Mission and is indicative only. Not all accreditations are listed; and listing does not necessarily mean that passport applications have been received from each State of accreditation.

Mission	Applications received
ABU DHABI	
- UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Afghanistan	1,421
ABUJA	
- Nigeria, Chad, Ghana, Senegal	267
ADDIS ABABA	
- Ethiopia, South Sudan	21

Mission	Applications received
ANKARA	
- Turkey, Azerbaijan, Iran, Pakistan	96
ATHENS	
- Greece, Albania, Serbia	123
BANGKOK	
- Thailand, Myanmar	297
BEIJING	
- China, Mongolia	863
BERLIN	
- Germany	1,548
BERNE	
- Switzerland, Algeria, Liechtenstein	755
BRASILIA	
- Brazil	121
BRATISLAVA	
- Slovakia	25
BRUSSELS	
- Belgium	587
BUCHAREST	
- Romania, Moldova, FYR Macedonia	77
BUDAPEST	
- Hungary, Republic of Kosovo, Montenegro	58
BUENOS AIRES	
- Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay	172
CAIRO	
- Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria	163
CANBERRA	
- Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea	9,801
COPENHAGEN	
- Denmark, Iceland	225
DAR-ES-SALAAM	
- Tanzania, Burundi, Eritrea	33
FREETOWN	
- Sierra Leone	6
HANOI	
- Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos	115
HELSINKI	
- Finland	75
JAKARTA	
- Indonesia	63
KAMPALA	
- Uganda, Rwanda	33
KUALA LUMPUR	

Mission	Applications received
- Malaysia	134
LILONGWE	
- Malawi	32
LISBON	
- Portugal, Morocco	156
LJUBLJANA	
- Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina	36
LONDON	
- UK (including Consulates)	50,885
LUSAKA	
- Zambia, Namibia	86
LUXEMBOURG	
- Luxembourg	244
MADRID	
- Spain, Andorra, Tunisia	1,471
MAPUTO	
- Mozambique, Angola, Botswana	39
MEXICO	
Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Peru, Venezuela	150
MOSCOW	
- Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan	90
NEW DELHI	
- India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Republic of Maldives	142
NICOSIA	
- Cyprus	129
NAIROBI	
- Kenya	108
OSLO	
- Norway	135
OTTAWA	
- Canada, Bahamas, Jamaica	2,869
PARIS	
- France, Monaco	1,972
PRAGUE	
- Czech Republic, Ukraine	111
PRETORIA	
- South Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mauritius, Zimbabwe	2,854
RIGA	
- Latvia	14
RIYADH	



Mission	Applications received
- Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Yemen	429
ROME	
- Italy, Libya, San Marino	389
SEOUL	
- Republic of Korea	65
SINGAPORE	
- Singapore, Philippines, Brunei, East Timor	619
SOFIA	
- Bulgaria, Armenia, Georgia	42
STOCKHOLM	
- Sweden	225
TALLIN	
- Estonia	8
TEL AVIV	
- Israel	154
THE HAGUE	
- Netherlands	677
TOKYO	
- Japan	137
VALETTA	
- Malta	95
VIENNA	
- Austria	214
VILNIUS	
- Lithuania, Belarus	35
WARSAW	
- Poland	153
WASHINGTON	15,300
- USA (including all Consulates General)	
	97,144

### Overseas Development Aid Data

73. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the most vulnerable locations globally to which Irish aid continues to be directed; the success of such operations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53486/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon):** The Government's Policy for International Development, "One World, One Future" make explicit Ireland's commitment to work in support of lasting benefits for the most vulnerable and poorest communities around the world.

Ireland's international development programme maintains a strong focus on Sub-Saharan Africa, and on other countries where the need is greatest. In 2016, over half of Ireland's bilateral ODA was directed to Least Developed Countries. In the same year, eight of the top ten recipient countries of Irish development assistance were in Africa – seven of which are classified as

fragile by the OECD Development Assistance Committee.

Ireland is also committed to providing support to people and countries experiencing humanitarian crises. In 2016, more than one quarter of Ireland's overseas development aid was spent on humanitarian response. It is anticipated that by the end of 2017 approximately one quarter of Ireland's ODA will again have been disbursed in direct response to crisis and conflict. A Country Categorisation of Needs method which ranks crises according to risk and needs is used to ensure that our humanitarian response is focused on areas where need is greatest.

All countries in the broader Horn of Africa region - apart from Djibouti - currently fall within Categories 1 and 2, the categories where the greatest need has been identified. As a result, Ireland provides substantial humanitarian assistance to South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Sudan.

In addition, significant resources are committed to vulnerable and crisis affected communities in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. Forgotten crises, such as in Chad, the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, are also prioritised for support.

High standards of accountability are continually maintained to ensure that Irish development assistance continues to have transformative impacts. Programmes in receipt of funding are subject to regular monitoring to ensure intended results are being achieved and resources have been used appropriately.

Full details of the distribution of our aid, and the results achieved, are published each year in our Annual Report. The 2016 Annual Report is available at [www.irishaid.ie](http://www.irishaid.ie).

### **International Terrorism**

**74. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he and his EU and UN colleagues continue to address the threat of international terrorism; if particular initiatives are likely with a view to protecting peaceful persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53487/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Ireland is fully engaged in the approaches being developed by the European Union and the United Nations to combat terrorism, in particular, the need for greater international cooperation to address the underlying factors that contribute to terrorist related threats and violence.

In the case of the European Union, Foreign Ministers remain focused on implementation of the June 2017 Council Conclusions on Counter-terrorism and on the contribution that the EU can make through external action to preventing and countering terrorism. Engagement with third countries to prevent violent extremism and to strengthen their capacity to detect and prevent terrorism, in full compliance with international law and human rights, remains at the core of the EU's strategy.

The EU has also placed considerable emphasis on strengthening co-operation with its immediate neighbours in the Western Balkans, Turkey and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries through dedicated political dialogue and the cultivation of effective counter-terrorism partnerships.

The European Council has also expressed its support for practical cooperation and coordination between the EU and the United Nations in the area of counter-terrorism and has welcomed the establishment in June 2017 of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism by the UN Secretary

General. This office will provide strategic leadership to United Nations counter-terrorism efforts.

The former UN Secretary General's comprehensive *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism*, presented in January 2016, and subsequent reports are an important and welcome contribution to addressing the threat posed by international terrorism. These highlight the need to examine drivers of violent extremism through dialogue and conflict prevention, strengthening governance and the rule of law, gender equality and empowering women, community engagement and youth empowerment, and education and skills development.

Two initiatives in which Ireland has been particularly engaged are the effects of violent extremism on Youth and Women, and their role in countering such extremism. Ireland was strongly supportive of the adoption last year by the Security Council of Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security. This Resolution confirmed that inclusion and participation by young people must lie at the core of efforts by the international community to respond to crises and conflict.

Women, Peace and Security is also a key element in the fight against violent extremism. Ireland has long been a supporter of the full implementation of Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security and its successor Resolutions. Women can have an important role to play in helping to counter radicalisation and extremism in their families and communities, and also have the potential to be radicalised themselves. Therefore, effective Countering Violent Extremism strategies must take cognisance of the particular situation and perspectives of women and girls into consideration.

## EU Issues

75. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which efforts are ongoing within the European Union to address the issue of euroscepticism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53488/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Euroscepticism is not new but in recent years it has become stronger and more vocal. In the Rome Declaration of March this year, EU Heads of State and Government pledged 'to listen and respond to the concerns expressed by our citizens' and to "address the challenges of a rapidly changing world."

The EU has emerging from a period of crisis and is moving forward to a new more positive phase. The setback suffered by populist parties in a number of recent European elections and the return of economic growth to all EU countries have contributed to this new optimism. To maintain this impetus we need to ensure that the EU is delivering practical improvements to the lives of citizens through policies to promote jobs and growth and by addressing internal and external challenges such as migration and international terrorism.

The public launch of the Citizens' Dialogue on the Future of Europe by the Taoiseach last month marked the formal start of a process designed to engage the Irish public directly in a debate on the kind of Europe they want to see evolve. Our aim is to raise awareness of the issues involved; to encourage participation in the debate; and to use this engagement process to formulate Ireland's contribution to the wider European debate and specifically to President Tusk's Leaders' Agenda, an ambitious work programme for the EU for the next two years.

Engaging meaningfully with our citizens across the Union and responding to their concerns is the best means of ensuring support for our work on EU issues.

## Brexit Negotiations

76. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to ensure that Ireland's position as a member of the EU is not diminished in the Brexit-related discussions or EU generated review of taxation or other structural reviews with particular reference to phase 2 negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53489/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The second phase of the Article 50 negotiations will enable discussions to get underway between the EU and the UK on transitional arrangements and on the framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK.

Ireland's overriding objective is that a future EU-UK agreement should be comprehensive and ambitious and as wide as possible in its scope, while ensuring a level playing field and protecting the integrity of the Single Market.

More broadly, we continue to make clear to EU partners, to third countries, and to business and civil society, that Ireland's place is at the heart of the European Union. This point is being pressed home at the public outreach meetings taking place under the Citizens' Dialogue initiative launched last month. Moreover, the Irish people are strongly committed to EU membership as has been shown in numerous opinion polls over many years. It is imperative that we use our influence to shape the future direction of the European Union. Each Member State, Ireland included, will be bringing its own contributions to the debate. We will continue to work closely with partners to advance and defend Ireland's interests across the range of policy areas.

We have undertaken extensive analysis of the consequences of Brexit and our unequivocal conclusion is that our future interests are best served by remaining a fully committed member of the European Union, notwithstanding the UK's departure.

We do not see any link, nor has any link been suggested by any other Member State, between the solidarity demonstrated by partners in regard to Brexit and our approach to other priority issues.

## Foreign Conflicts

77. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the EU continues to monitor and encourage the positive and democratic process in the western Balkans; the degree to which each country there that complies with the *acquis communautaire* in line with EU requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53490/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** There are four countries in the Western Balkans with candidate status – Albania, the Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina are potential candidates.

The EU, including Ireland, continues to monitor closely the progress of these countries in the implementation of reforms required to align with the *acquis communautaire*. Ireland places a strong emphasis on the need for the requirements of the *acquis* to be fulfilled by applicants, including on the human rights and rule of law issues that are essential for a functioning democracy. We support candidates in their efforts to achieve the required standards.

The incoming Bulgarian Presidency of the EU has indicated that the Western Balkans will be a priority of their presidency, culminating in a summit in Sofia in May 2018. In the meantime, the European Commission will publish a strategy for enlargement and ‘state of play’ reports on each of the individual countries, which will be assessed by the working groups of the European Union and will be discussed by Ministers at the General Affairs Council in the New Year.

As a strong supporter of the accession process, which we view as a transformative driver for stability, peace and democracy, Ireland looks forward to seeing a renewed focus on this region in the coming months, and supports all efforts to enhance regional relationships and institutional reform.

### **Undocumented Irish in the USA**

78. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the efforts being made to identify with and support the needs of the undocumented Irish in the US; the extent to which ongoing negotiations continue to take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53491/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Government continues to identify with and support the needs of Irish immigrants living in the United States, including undocumented Irish citizens.

The Government remains wholly committed to working with the US authorities to resolve the plight of the undocumented Irish, while respecting the right of the United States to set its own immigration policies.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has worked closely with Irish immigration centres in the United States for many years on this issue.

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

Those meetings were an opportunity for me to hear first-hand about the issues impacting on the undocumented. It was also an opportunity for me to update those present on our efforts, at both political and official level, to find a solution for the undocumented Irish. Those efforts are continuing.

The Government continues to avail of all opportunities to raise US immigration reform and the status of the undocumented Irish with the US administration and with key contacts on Capitol Hill.

I met with a senior State Department official during my September visit and I was able to further emphasise the Government’s commitment to this issue when I travelled to Washington DC on 3 - 5 October last.

The Government’s commitment to the undocumented has again been evidenced by the appointment of Deputy John Deasy as special envoy to Congress on the undocumented Irish.

Deputy Deasy accompanied me on my October visit to Washington DC and together we engaged with senior members of the US administration and with members of Congress, including the Congressional Friends of Ireland Group.

Deputy Deasy has been very active since his appointment, visiting the US a total of four



times since his appointment - in July, September, October, and November.

In addition to contact at political level, officials from our Embassy in Washington D.C. stay in regular contact with the administration and with congressional contacts on both sides of the aisle.

Ireland's ambassador to the United States, Dan Mulhall, hosted a round table discussion on the undocumented on 25 October last with Irish community representatives from across the United States, including representatives of the Coalition of Irish Immigration Centres.

None of us, however, underestimate the size of the challenge facing us.

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

The Deputy can be assured that officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, both here and in Washington, D.C., will, under my direction, continue to give priority to this issue, mindful of its importance to the undocumented themselves and their families in Ireland.

### **Humanitarian Aid Provision**

**79. Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the new steps that can be taken to address the refugee crisis in Syria and Iraq; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53493/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Through the EU, Ireland has long advocated for and supported the development of durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons, and in tackling the root causes of displacement.

Through our engagement with conflict-affected countries, refugee hosting countries and our EU counterparts, Ireland supports conflict resolution and development in Syria, Iraq and the wider region. The situation in Syria continues to be one of utmost concern. The conflict, which is now in its seventh year, has cost an estimated half a million lives. Over 13 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria, including close to 3 million people trapped in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. Over 6 million people are displaced internally, and a further 5.5 million have fled to neighbouring countries and the wider region. An end to the violence is urgently needed in order to relieve the suffering of the Syrian people. The peaceful resolution of the conflict in Syria is a foreign policy priority for Ireland. Ireland fully supports the UN-led Geneva peace process and the work of UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura.

Ireland's Overseas Development Aid (ODA) budget has consistently supported responses to humanitarian crises. In 2016, €194 million, more than one quarter of our ODA, was directed to humanitarian need, including support for the response to the crises in Syria and Iraq. Since 2012, Ireland has contributed over €90 million to the humanitarian response to the Syria crisis alone. Ireland has fulfilled its pledge to provide at least €25 million in humanitarian assistance to the region during 2017. Through our annual contributions to EU Institutions, Ireland also supports the EU's humanitarian response to the Syria crisis, from which €445 million was contributed in 2016. The EU is also supporting the Turkey Refugee Facility in response to the almost 3 million refugees being hosted in that country. €3 billion has been committed to this by the EU between 2016 and 2019, with Ireland providing €22.9 million.

In 2015 the Government established the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) in

response to the humanitarian crisis in Southern Europe as a due to mass migration and people fleeing conflicts in the Middle East and Africa. Under the terms of this programme, administered by the Department of Justice, Ireland has committed to accept up to 4,000 refugees from the region. To date, 1,502 people have already arrived with another 325 people expected to arrive in December and early in the New Year.

In Iraq, the UN estimates that 11 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, as the country begins to recover from the atrocities committed by Daesh. The current number of internally displaced persons requiring humanitarian assistance stands at almost 3.3 million, of which 1.6 million are living outside of camps in host communities. In addition, there are an estimated 240,000 Syrian refugees in Iraq. The EU is working to support the Iraqi government on stabilisation and reconciliation. In areas liberated from Daesh, the EU focuses on demining, the return of internally displaced persons and resilience. The EU supports an inclusive process of reconciliation, to build a common vision on the future of the country. Ireland has consistently called for inclusive democratic measures to allow for genuine national reconciliation, in order to create the environment for long-term viable stability in Iraq and the wider region.

Since 2014, Ireland has provided over €8 million in humanitarian assistance to Iraq, including €2 million in 2017 for the UN Iraq Humanitarian Pooled Fund.

Via our annual contributions to the EU budget, Ireland also supports the EU's humanitarian response to the situation in Iraq, which amounts to €548 million since 2014.

The situations in both Syria and Iraq were discussed by EU Foreign Ministers at the Foreign Affairs Council meeting in Brussels on Monday. At the Foreign Affairs Council in April of this year, EU Foreign Ministers agreed a new strategy for Syria. The EU is currently working on a new EU strategy for engagement with Iraq which will set out our priority actions for the period ahead.

### **Middle East Peace Process**

80. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which ongoing efforts remain to encourage re-engagement in the peace process in the Middle East; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53494/17]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Ireland, along with our EU partners, supports the achievement of a two state solution to the Middle East conflict. This support includes political efforts to encourage a resumption of direct negotiations, which are ultimately the only way to achieve peace. It also includes action on the ground on human rights and justice issues affecting Palestinians under occupation, including settlement activity, which are progressively endangering the prospects of such a peace agreement.

In recent months the new United States administration has been actively exploring the possibilities for re-launching the process to reach a comprehensive peace agreement. This engagement is very welcome, and I have met myself with the US team to encourage their work and to underline to them the key parameters for an agreement which the EU has long espoused.

I was very disappointed at the US announcement recognising Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and initiating steps to move the US Embassy. I issued a statement describing this decision as premature and ill-advised, and unhelpful to efforts to resolve the conflict in the Middle East. High Representative Mogherini issued a similar statement on behalf of the EU.

In discussions with my EU colleagues, most recently at the Foreign Affairs Council on

Monday, I have urged that the EU must continue to encourage an appropriate US initiative, but also that the EU continue our own work, including work on the ground to help preserve and create the political and physical space in which the two state solution can be achieved. I am actively exploring with EU colleagues how this can best be done.

### **Tax Code**

81. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he has scoped the potential impact of proposed United States tax changes to the taxation of intellectual property on the State; the level of research his Department or other Departments or agencies are involved in to quantify the possible impact here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53289/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The proposed changes in the US tax code currently being debate by the US Congress are relevant to all countries that trade with the United States. The importance of US tax rules is reflected in the fact that the proposed changes were discussed by European Finance Ministers at the recent ECOFIN meeting.

The proposed legislation has not yet been finalised or signed into law at this point in time. The full implications of US tax reform for Ireland, and the rest of the world, will depend on the exact nature of any changes which are ultimately agreed by both Houses of Congress and President Trump.

It is not just changes to the taxation of intellectual property that could be relevant, but rather the proposed broader changes to the US international tax regime and how the US tax the overseas operations of US business. I am supportive of US proposals that ensure tax is not artificially avoided through base erosion or profit shifting, but care is needed so that genuine commercial arrangements are not hit with double taxation which is damaging to economic activity, trade and investment. It is important that any anti-avoidance measures adopted by the US recognise that international trade between companies and countries is mutually beneficial and should be encouraged. These are points I made to US legislators during my recent visit to the US.

My officials, together with our Embassy in Washington, have been closely tracking the debate and progress of the proposed US legislation. My officials have also been in regular contact with the Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation as part of efforts to analyse the potential impacts of US tax reform.

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

### **Excise Duties Yield**

82. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated additional revenue yield if a publican's excise licence and on the value of turnover was in excess of €1.270 million increased from €3,805 to €5,125. [53356/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that 390 licences were issued to traders declaring an annual turnover in excess of €1.27m during the 2016/2017 licensing year, which ended on 30 September 2017. The total Excise Licence Duty

payable by these traders was €1,483,950 (€3,805 x 390).

If the Excise Licence Duty payable had been €5,125 in the same period the total Excise Licence Duty payable would have amounted to €1,998,750. This would represent an increase of €514,800.

### **Revenue Commissioners Expenditure**

83. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated full year cost of providing ten additional statistician and economist posts for the Revenue Commissioners. [53357/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that recruitment of analytical staff, such as economists, statisticians or other data analysts, in Revenue is generally addressed through specialist recruitment. As well as direct recruitment or internal promotion of staff with relevant background or experience in these areas, Revenue also benefits from economist recruitment panels established by the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service and the secondment of Statisticians from the Central Statistics Office.

Through these channels, economists, statisticians and analysts are recruited by Revenue at a mix of grades, primarily at Administrative Officer and Assistant Principal levels.

Statisticians may be recruited at two levels in the civil service: 1. Administrative Officer (AO) equivalent, the average annual cost for a Statistician, AO equivalent, is estimated at €81,710; 2. Assistant Principal (AP) equivalent, the average annual cost for a Statistician, AP equivalent is estimated at €117,587.

Economists may be recruited at two levels in the civil service: 1. Administrative Officer (AO) equivalent, the average annual cost for an Economist, AO equivalent, is estimated at €67,979; 2. Assistant Principal (AP) equivalent, the average annual cost for an Economist, AP equivalent is estimated at €107,190.

The required grade mix is dependent on the nature of the work to be undertaken. Therefore it is not possible to provide an estimate for the cost of 10 additional staff as this would first require an assessment of the work for such staff to determine the appropriate staffing mix.

### **Stamp Duty**

84. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the situation in a case in which a sale is agreed and deposit paid for land on 10 October 2017, but no contract has been signed regarding non-residential property on transactions eligible for the 2% rate under transitional relief measures; if the lower rate of stamp duty is still applicable if the contract is executed before year end; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53384/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The rate of stamp duty on commercial land was increased to 6% on Budget Day, this rate applies in relation to all relevant conveyances executed after midnight on 10 October 2017. I subsequently introduced transitional measures in the Finance Bill that will allow for the previous rate of 2% to continue to apply where the parties to a contract entered into a binding contract before 11 October 2017 and where the conveyance or transfer is executed on or before 31 December 2017. Both of these conditions must be satisfied.

I am advised by Revenue that the payment of a deposit does not, of itself, necessarily in-

dicating that the parties to a transaction had entered into a binding contract for the conveyance of property. If individuals are in doubt about the status of a transaction they should consult with their legal advisors to determine whether they had, in fact, entered into binding contracts before 11 October 2017 and indeed, whether the conveyances will be executed on or before 31 December 2017.

### **Real Estate Investment Trusts**

85. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if consideration has been given to introducing the concept of a deemed disposal for non-resident investors in REITS and IREF, as applies to Irish resident investors in unit funds (details supplied). [53385/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) are purpose designed vehicles for real estate investment. A requirement placed on REITs is that, in general, 85% of their property income is distributed as a dividend to investors each year. This 85% obligation does not apply in years where the REIT cannot, for example because of an insufficiency of distributable reserves, make a distribution. Therefore, non-residents are charged to Irish tax on their share of the profits distributed each year. As such, REITs are not designed to have any significant amount of undistributed property income to which a deemed disposal event could apply.

Introduced in Finance Act 2016, Irish Real Estate Funds or IREFs are investment undertakings, excluding UCITS, where 25% of the value of that undertaking is made up of Irish real estate assets.

The provision addressed the concerns raised regarding the use of collective investment vehicles by non-residents to invest in Irish property. The investors had been using the structures to minimise their exposure to Irish tax on Irish property transactions.

IREFs must deduct a 20% withholding tax on certain property distributions to non-resident investors. The withholding tax will not apply to certain categories of investors such as pension funds, life assurance companies and other collective investment undertakings.

An IREF taxable event occurs when a unit holder receives value for the accrued profits of the IREF. In most cases this will be on the::

- making of a cash or a non-cash distribution to a unit holder; or
- the cancellation, redemption or repurchase of units from a unit holder;

However, the other methods in which value can be realised and which therefore need to trigger the IREF withholding tax are:

- any exchange by a unit holder of units in one sub-fund of the IREF for units in another sub-fund of the IREF;
- the issuing of units as paid-up unless new consideration has been received by the IREF;
- the IREF ceasing to be an IREF or an investment undertaking.

A deemed disposal rule in the context of IREFs may not be practicable.

At Committee and Report stages of the Finance Bill I agreed that certain issues raised in respect of IREFs and REITs would be examined by the Tax Strategy Group. The Tax Strategy



Group papers will be published in Summer 2018.

### **Tracker Mortgage Examination**

86. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Finance if financial institutions are meeting their targets in respect of the tracker mortgage scandal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53406/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy is aware, the Central Bank's most recent Tracker Mortgage Examination status update report was issued on 17 October last and it indicated that, as at the end of September, approximately 13,000 mortgage accounts have been identified as impacted through the examination. This is additional to the 7,100 mortgage accounts which were rectified and remedied prior to the commencement of the industry wide examination. In addition, since the October update report, one lender has accepted that it has a further 6,000 impacted accounts. Lenders have also commenced the payment of redress and compensation to impacted customers and to end of September €120 million had been provided to customers in respect of approximately 3,300 accounts pursuant to the examination. A further €43 million in redress and compensation payments was paid by two lenders prior to the commencement of the industry wide examination.

The Central Bank will publish a further update report on the tracker examination next week and I look forward to receiving this. It will be important to find out more conclusively the number of people who have been affected by the tracker scandal and the progress banks have made to deal with their impacted customers. It remains the priority of the Government and the Central Bank to complete the tracker examination as quickly as possible and to ensure that all impacted accounts are identified and that appropriate redress and compensation is paid to the affected borrowers.

### **NAMA Assets Sale**

87. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Finance the details and timelines of NAMA's sale of land at a location (details supplied); if the sale was on an open market basis with a competitive tendering process; if not, the reasons an open market sale was not pursued; when the land was sold; the date that agreement was signed; if there were deposits for the purchase of the land in place before the sale of the land; the disposal strategy of NAMA in relation to the sale of the land; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53421/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised that NAMA did not own the property in question. Its role in relation to the property was as the secured lender. The property was owned and managed by the debtor, who had responsibility for the management of the sales process.

I am advised by NAMA that the property in question was not sold during the period when the loans were owned by NAMA. Nor was there a binding legal agreement in place whereby the debtor, who has a right to seek to achieve the maximum value for their assets, was obligated to sell the property to a particular purchaser.

I am advised that, over a 15 month period, NAMA endeavoured, in good faith, to facilitate the sale of this property by the debtor to an educational institution. In order to enable the sale to the institution, NAMA approved the sale at an agreed independent valuation in March 2016. However, the purchaser did not sign the contracts or pay a deposit until December 2016. I am



advised that, by the time NAMA was notified that the purchaser had signed the contracts, the connected loans of the debtor had already been contracted for sale to a third party as part of a multi-connection loan sale which had been openly marketed in a competitive loan sales process. This loan sale was progressed in keeping with NAMA's statutory mandate to deal expeditiously with its assets.

I am advised that, after the loans were sold, NAMA was no longer in a position to influence matters relating to the property. For the avoidance of doubt, contracts for the sale of the property did not exchange during the time that the property was secured to NAMA.

Lastly, I am advised that where loans relating to a property are sold before an associated asset sale has contracted, the loan acquirer is generally made aware that the property is at "sale agreed" stage. NAMA have confirmed that this was the case in the transaction referenced by the Deputy. However, the Deputy will also appreciate that NAMA's involvement with a given property ends once the loans are sold and any future commercial decisions regarding underlying assets are entirely a matter for the loan acquirer and associated debtor.

### **Insurance Compensation Fund**

88. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the Insurance Compensation Fund cannot pay more frequently than once every six months; if the restriction is in primary legislation or in regulations; the specific provision or provisions that imposes this restriction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53468/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Deputy will be aware that under the Insurance Act 1964, as amended, monies may be paid out of the Insurance Compensation Fund (ICF), with the approval of the High Court, in relation to an insolvent insurer, to meet claims up to a limit of 65% or €825,000 of the claim, whichever is the lesser.

Section 3B(1)(a) of the Insurance Act 1964, as inserted by Section 4 of the Insurance (Amendment) Act 2011, provides that applications to the High Court may be made by the Accountant of the Courts of Justice, where the insurer in liquidation is authorised in a Member State other than Ireland, not more than once in every 6 month period.

This provision was inserted to ensure that excessive legal and administrative costs are not imposed on the ICF and to enable claims to be made in respect of a number of policyholders at a time rather than in respect of each policyholder individually.

It should be noted that heads of the Insurance (Amendment) Bill were approved by Government in July and then sent to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel for priority drafting and to the Joint Oireachtas Committee for pre-legislative scrutiny. This legislation based on the recommendations of the Review of the Framework for Motor Insurance Compensation in Ireland will amend the relevant Insurance Acts to, inter alia, reduce the limitation on the frequency of applications to 3 month intervals.

The proposed Bill will also provide for the transfer of responsibility for administration of the Fund from the Accountant of the High Court to the Central Bank of Ireland as well a providing for a more formal role for the State Claims Agency. The revised arrangements will provide for a more efficient and effective compensation process in the event of a call on the ICF.

### **Tax Reliefs Data**

89. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of tax relief claimed on health expenses in each of the past five years; the number of persons or tax units in receipt of this relief in each of the past five years; the number of claims that were investigated in each of the past five years; the number of claims that were disallowed in each of the past five years, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53482/17]

90. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of tax relief claimed on nursing home expenses in each of the past five years; the number of persons or tax units in receipt of this relief in each of the past five years in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53483/17]

91. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of tax relief claimed on the costs of employing a home carer in each of the past five years; the number of persons or tax units in receipt of this relief in each of the past five years in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53484/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 89 to 91, inclusive, together.

I am advised by Revenue that the Cost of Tax Expenditures Table is available on the Revenue Statistics webpage at <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/tax-expenditures/costs-expenditures.aspx>. This sets out, in tabular form, data on a wide range of reliefs, credits and allowances including health expenses, nursing home related health expenses and expenses relating to employing a person to take care of an incapacitated individual. Please note that 'Person taking care of incapacitated taxpayer' relates to the cost of employing a person to take care of an incapacitated individual.

The table sets out the numbers of claims reviewed and disapproved for health expenses since 2013. This information covers claims by PAYE cases only. I am advised by Revenue that to include the same information in respect of self assessed cases would require a significant manual review of records, which it is not feasible to undertake.

Year	No. of Claims Reviewed	Value of Claims	No. of Claims Disapproved	Amount Disallowed
2013	7,945	€3,798,200	1,340	€908,992
2014	5,859	€2,770,178	1,092	€747,832
2015	6,132	€2,766,510	1,052	€699,290
2016	7,326	€3,038,810	1,221	€785,490
2017 (to date)	8,641	€4,583,867	1,374	€1,102,720
Total	35,903	€16,957,565	6,079	€4,244,324

### **Ireland Strategic Investment Fund Investments**

92. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Finance the role and function of the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF); the way in which the ISIF met its stated function of achieving positive economic impact in addition to its investment returns, in 2016 and to date in 2017; the positive economic activity that is a direct result of the ISIF and would not have occurred otherwise; the co-investment partners the ISIF secured in 2016 and to date in 2017; his plans to change ISIF's mandate to allow it to invest in deadweight or displacement investments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53495/17]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Ireland Strategic Investment Fund

(“ISIF”) has a statutory mandate to invest on a commercial basis in a manner designed to support economic activity and employment in Ireland.

All ISIF investments are considered in terms of their potential risk - adjusted commercial return prospects and the potential economic impact. The Fund targets those areas for investment which have higher potential economic and employment impact, these will form the majority – approximately 80% - of the ISIF portfolio over time. Some of the sectors with the lowest levels of deadweight and displacement and highest levels of additionality would be those involved in exports, manufacturing, and internationally-traded services.

Key figures from the ISIF’s most recent Economic Impact Report show that as at 31 December 2016:

- approximately 22,000 jobs are supported directly and indirectly by ISIF investments
- 140 Irish companies and projects are benefitting from ISIF investments

Updated economic data as at 30 June 2017 will be published by the NTMA shortly.

The ISIF seeks co-investors, where possible, to ensure the commerciality of its investments and leverage the economic impact that can be obtained from ISIF resources. As at 30 September 2017, the ISIF’s €3 bn has unlocked third party capital to generate an estimated total investment commitment of €8.4 bn in Ireland.

I continue to monitor and consider ISIF’s future strategy, but have no plans to change ISIF’s statutory mandate to sanction any actions that would allow it intentionally engage in dead-weight or displacement investment.

### **Garda Station Refurbishment**

93. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the planned parking works at Farnanes Garda station, County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53499/17]

97. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the planned parking works at a Garda station (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53451/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 93 and 97 together.

I can confirm that the Office of Public Works (OPW) received an enquiry from local Gardaí about developing the parking facilities at the Garda Station in question.

All requests for capital works at Garda Stations must be approved by Garda Estate Management (GEM) of An Garda Síochána and funding confirmed before they can be scheduled by OPW for delivery. At present, the OPW regional office is assisting local Garda management in developing and costing a proposal for consideration by GEM.

### **Humanitarian Assistance Scheme**

94. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the supports made available to meet the housing needs of those affected by flooding

in Finn valley and Inishowen in August 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53287/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** The Government has provided many supports to assist those households affected by flooding in Donegal last August.

The Local Authorities would have the principal responsibility for housing needs in their area and Donegal County Council would be able to provide information regarding the status of any supports that they have provided.

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) operates a humanitarian assistance scheme to assist households in the immediate aftermath of emergency events such as flooding.

The purpose of the humanitarian assistance scheme is to prevent hardship by providing income-tested financial support to people whose homes are damaged from flooding and severe weather events and who are not in a position to meet costs for essential needs, household items and in some instances structural repair.

DEASP have advised that there is a time-lag between the flooding event and claims for financial support as the full extent of the damage to homes only becomes known when the flood water abates and the properties dry out. As such, that Department can be contacted for a full breakdown of their work in Donegal in the aftermath of the flood event in August 2017.

Homeowners affected by the flooding in August 2017 may be considered for humanitarian assistance for relocation under the 2017 Voluntary Homeowners Relocation Scheme if they also flooded in Winter 2015/2016 and meet the terms of that scheme. My officials are working with Donegal County Council to identify properties in this regard.

A core element of national flood policy is to assess areas at potentially significant risk from flooding and develop Flood Risk Management Plans through the Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme. The Programme is focussing on 300 Areas for Further Assessment (AFAs) including 90 coastal areas, mainly in urban locations nationwide, identified as being at potentially significant risk of flooding. It is the principal vehicle for implementing the EU Floods Directive and national flood policy.

There are a number of AFAs in the Finn Valley and Inishowen areas and the details that outline any proposed measures for these AFAs will be included in the Flood Risk Management Plans.

The final Plans are currently undergoing an independent review of the strategic level environmental assessments by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Once this independent review of all Plans is completed and observations addressed, in early 2018, I expect to seek approval from the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform for the 29 Flood Risk Management Plans developed under the CFRAM Programme.

Thereafter, I would hope to announce the proposed structural measures contained within those Plans that will be taken, through a prioritised approach over the coming years, to detailed design to protect those communities at assessed risk.

## **Garda Station Closures**

95. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if consideration will be given to making a vacant Garda station (details supplied) in County Kerry available for community use; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53372/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** The former Garda station at Camp, Co. Kerry closed on 31 January 2013 as part of An Garda Síochána's 2013 Policing Plan.

As part of the Programme for a Partnership Government, the Policing Authority was asked to oversee a review of all closed Garda stations with a view to the possible reopening of some stations. While An Garda Síochána has identified six former stations for reopening, the final outcome of the review has yet to be published. The Commissioners of Public Works are required to await the result of this review before any decision can be reached on the future use of these closed Garda stations

The policy of the Office of Public Works (OPW) with regard to non-operational (vacant) State property, including the former Garda station at Camp, Co. Kerry is to:

1. Identify if the property is required/suitable for alternative State use by either Government Departments or the wider public sector.

2. If there is no other State use identified for a property, the OPW will then consider disposing of the property on the open market if and when conditions prevail, in order to generate revenue for the Exchequer.

3. If no State requirement is identified or if a decision is taken not to dispose of a particular property, the OPW may consider community involvement (subject to a detailed written submission, which would indicate that the community/voluntary group has the means to insure, maintain and manage the property and that there are no ongoing costs for the Exchequer).

In light of the above, the former Garda station at Camp is therefore not available for use by the local Community Council.

### **Public Sector Staff Retirements**

96. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the sectors within the public service which will not benefit from the phased increase of the retirement age from 65 to 70 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53404/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** There are certain groups of employees in the public service who, due to the nature of their work, are currently required to retire early. Members of An Garda Síochána, the Permanent Defence Force, Firefighters and Prison Officers are the constituent groups in this category, which are collectively referred to as the uniformed pension fast accrual group.

These public servants currently have earlier compulsory retirement ages (the age at which they must retire) than other public servants. In recognition of this, their superannuation terms are such that they accrue pension benefits at an accelerated rate.

The Government agreed that the compulsory retirement age for these groups of employees can only be dealt with at sectoral level where the detailed policy, operational and manpower issues relevant to those groups can be appropriately considered. On that basis, the increases in the compulsory retirement age for pre 2004 public servants announced last week will not apply



to those groups of public servants. Retirement ages for those groups will remain a matter for individual consideration in the context of the particular operational considerations arising for such groups, which can best be addressed by the respective Ministers.

*Question No. 97 answered with Question No. 93.*

### **Departmental Communications**

98. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the cost of running the creative youth pull out section in a newspaper (details supplied); the Department that authorised it; if his Department authorised it; if his Department was consulted before authorisation was provided; if this was an initiative by the strategic communications unit, SCU; the role of the SCU in this; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53498/17]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** This is not a matter for my Department, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Matters in relation to the Strategic Communications unit are for the Department of Taoiseach in the first instance.

### **Special Educational Needs Data**

99. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of school places in mainstream schools that have been made available to accommodate children with special needs nationally and for the school years 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017/-8, by county, in tabular form; the adequacy of the provisions of these additional school places for children with special needs in relation to demand both nationally for the same period, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53291/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** It is the policy of my Department that all children with Special Educational Needs can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

Such placements facilitate access to individualised education programmes which may draw from a range of appropriate educational interventions, delivered by fully qualified professional teachers, with the support of Special Needs Assistants and the appropriate school curriculum.

Some students, although academically able to access the curriculum in mainstream, may find it too difficult to manage full-time placement there. This can be due to significant difficulties in areas such as behaviour or sensory needs which have not been ameliorated, even with appropriate intervention, in mainstream.

Special classes are sanctioned in mainstream schools for students with special educational needs arising from certain disabilities.

Enrolment in a special class should only be considered where it has been demonstrated that a student requires the support of a special class because he/she is unable to learn effectively in a mainstream class for most or all of the school day even with appropriate supports.

In order to access a special class a student must have a report from a relevant professional or team of professionals (for example, psychologist, speech and language therapist, psychiatrist) stating that:



- S/he has a disability (in line with the designation of the special class in question) and
- S/he has complex or severe learning needs that require the support of a special class setting and the reasons why this is the case.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), in consultation with the relevant education partners, is responsible for organising and planning education provision for children with Special Educational Needs and the establishment of special class and special school placements in various geographical areas where there is an identified need.

The NCSE, in looking to open special classes, must take into account the present and future potential need for such classes, taking particular account of the educational needs of the children concerned. The NCSE will also take account of location and sustainability in looking to establish special classes in certain areas.

Since 2011, the NCSE has increased the number of special classes by over 130% from 548 in 2011 to 1,302 for the 2017/18 school year.

The number of students in special classes has almost doubled from 3,286 in 2011 to 6,392 in the 2016/17 school year. This reflects the priority which the Government has put on helping children with Special Educational Needs to achieve their potential.

While it is not always possible to ensure that a special class placement will be available in a child's local school, the NCSE has informed my Department that, in general, they are satisfied that sufficient special class placements were/are available to meet demand in the years referenced by the Deputy.

My Department continues to work with the NCSE to ensure that there is appropriate planning in place to ensure that all children who require special class or special school placements can access such placements.

Statistics in relation to special classes, including those sought by the Deputy, are available on the NCSE website, [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

### **Minor Works Scheme**

100. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to put the minor works funding on a statutory footing in order that it will be a guaranteed payment to schools each year in view of the fact that schools rely heavily on the minor works grant as part of their operational capital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53322/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** There are significant demands placed on the education capital budget annually due to demographic pressures, and the imperative of ensuring a school place for every child.

This year we will deliver nearly 19,000 permanent school places in state of the art facilities around the country. This compares to 8,900 permanent school places provided in 2010.

As part of our longer term infrastructural planning, my Department will explore whether it will be possible to give greater certainty to primary schools in relation to the payment of the Minor Works Grant taking account of the Government's 10 Year Public Capital Investment Plan, which is currently under development.

### Third Level Staff Data

101. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated cost in a full year if the student to staff ratio in institutes of technology decreased from 23:1 to 21:6. [53353/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** While currently the staff: student ratio across the University sector is 23:1, it is lower in the Institutes of Technology sector, with the current ratio at 19:1.

Higher education is a key priority for this Government. This is evidenced in the fact that we will be investing €60 million in additional funding in 2018. Combined with the increase in funding in 2017, this means that we will be investing €100m more in higher education in 2018 than in 2016.

### Schools Building Projects Status

102. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 50 of 6 December 2017, the seven County Wexford schools benefitting from major building projects under the school capital investment programme; the status of each project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53369/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy is aware, a total of seven schools in County Wexford are included on my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme.

The current status of the building projects for these schools is as follows:

Loreto Secondary School, Wexford - the new school building is under construction and is due to be completed within the coming weeks.

St Joseph's Primary School, Gorey - an extension to the existing school is under construction and it is expected that the project will be completed in early 2018.

Sites are required to facilitate the construction of permanent school buildings for Wexford Educate Together N.S. and Meanscoil Gharman, Enniscorthy and my Department is currently engaging with the Local Authority regarding the acquisition of suitable sites. When acquired, the architectural planning process to provide the new school buildings will be initiated.

A building project is also proposed for St Canice's Convent N.S. Rosbercon, New Ross and my Department is currently liaising with the school in relation to matters associated with the site.

In addition, extensions to Bridgetown College and Vocational College, Bunclody are proposed. In this regard, site visits to both schools have taken place as part of the preparatory work required for the projects.

### School Enrolments

103. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to address the shortage of primary school and secondary school places for children in the Wexford town district area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53370/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy is aware, my Department's capital programme continues to address the challenge posed by a rapidly increasing school population. To meet this demographic challenge, my Department's Capital Investment Programme (2016-2021), details the school projects that are being progressed through the architectural planning process towards tender and construction. The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for essential mainstream classrooms to meet the demand for extra school places and in cases where additional teachers have been appointed.

The progression of the seven school building projects for the Wexford schools included in the 6 Year Construction Plan will assist in meeting enrolment demand. As with other school planning areas nationwide, my Department is continuing to monitor the demographic data for the area referred to, taking into account updated child benefit data, the impact of planned expansion of school capacity and developments in the school planning areas adjacent to Wexford town.

There is currently a review underway of the need for school places across our 314 school planning areas, which is expected to identify new needs due to the higher than expected population recorded in the Census. It is anticipated that decisions based on these exercises will be announced shortly.

### **Institutes of Technology Funding**

104. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the retention of funds for the construction of a new IT Carlow campus in County Wexford will be guaranteed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53371/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department remains supportive of the proposed acquisition by IT Carlow of a site in Wexford for the development of a new purpose-built campus. In that regard, we are committed to retaining an allocation for the acquisition of an appropriate site in our budget next year.

We are working closely with the Higher Education Authority and IT Carlow on next steps.

### **Minor Works Scheme Payments**

105. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if in view of his recent statements to Dáil Éireann that the minor works grant for schools for 2018 would not be paid until the calendar year 2019, there will be a double payment in 2019, one in early 2019 carried over from 2018 and a second towards the end of 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53381/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I indicated to the House last week that the Minor Works Grant 2018/2019 would issue during the 2018/2019 school year. It is not possible to say at this stage if the payment will be made in late 2018, like this year, or early in 2019. I should point out that the payment of the Minor Works Grant is not confined to any particular date and can in fact, if paid, be issued during any month of the school year.

With regards to the 2019/2020 Minor Works Grant it is too early to indicate at this time when the grant will issue during that particular school year.

As part of our longer term infrastructural planning, my Department will explore whether it will be possible to give greater certainty to primary schools in relation to the payment of the Mi-

nor Works Grant, taking account of the Government's 10 Year Public Capital Investment Plan, which is currently under development.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

106. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of its total allocation under the capital investment plan 2016 to 2021 his Department has spent to date. [53416/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department's total capital expenditure in 2016 amounted to €703.8m and the capital allocation for 2017 amounting to €693.4m is expected to be fully expended by year-end.

### **Special Educational Needs Data**

107. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of ASD special classes in each county or local authority in tabular form. [53417/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The policy of my Department is to ensure that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with Autism, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

Such placements facilitate access to individualised education programmes which may draw from a range of appropriate educational interventions, delivered by fully qualified professional teachers, with the support of Special Needs Assistants and the appropriate school curriculum.

Almost 18,000 students in schools have been diagnosed with autism. My Department invests over €300m annually in providing additional resources specifically to support students with autism in schools enabling:

- 61% of students to attend mainstream schools
- 26% to attend special classes in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, and
- 13% to attend special schools.

In order to identify need in any area for forthcoming school years, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) refer to professional reports indicating students require the support of a special class. In this regard Parents/Guardians of students with ASD seeking a special class placement should provide the relevant professional report to their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) to inform the planning process. The report must state that:

- S/he has ASD
- S/he has significant learning needs that require the support of a special class setting and the reasons why this is the case.

Since 2011 the NCSE has increased the number of special classes by over 130% from 548 in 2011 to 1,300 across the country in 2017, of which 1,042 are Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) special classes. This reflects the priority which the Government has put on helping children with Special Educational Needs to achieve their potential.

The NCSE, in looking to open special classes, must take into account the present and future potential need for such classes, taking particular account of the educational needs of the children concerned. The NCSE will also take account of location and sustainability in looking to establish special classes in certain areas.

My Department continues to work with the NCSE to ensure that there is appropriate planning in place to ensure that all children who require special class placements can access such placements in schools within their communities.

Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs are available, in county order, on the NCSE website [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

### **Teacher Training Provision**

108. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of training provided to serving primary teachers specifically to support the implementation of the national literacy and numeracy strategy in each of the years 2011 to 2015; the number of substitute days paid by his Department in each of the years to facilitate such training; the cost to his Department of such training in each of the years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53418/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The National Strategy: Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life 2011-2020 set a clear vision, with targets, for raising standards in literacy and numeracy in early years, primary and post-primary settings by 2020.

In March 2017, I published the Report from the Interim Review of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. The Interim Review involved consideration of research findings, both national and international, and a consultation process with a wide range of stakeholders. The findings of the Interim Review showed that all of the targets set for reading and maths at primary level in the 2011 Strategy have been reached, in little over half of the Strategy's lifetime, and significant progress has been made towards achievement of targets at post-primary. In light of these findings, the Report of the Interim Review contained new and updated targets, to match my ambition to make the Irish education system the best in Europe by 2026.

These targets, along with additional actions in priority areas, will help maintain focus on progressing literacy and numeracy achievement to 2020.

Professional development support for The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020 has been provided in the years 2011 to 2015 by a number of Department funded support services. These include the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) and the Special Education Support Service (SESS).

PDST and SESS have supported teacher training with dedicated literacy, numeracy and leadership teams for both the primary and the post-primary sectors. A comprehensive range of summer courses for primary teachers have also been provided with a focus on Literacy and Numeracy. Full details of the PDST programme of support 2011 to 2015 is contained in the attached document.

The acquisition and development of language and the development of modes of communication are the foundations of the development of literacy and numeracy skills of all students and most especially those students with special educational needs. This has been reflected across

the programme of support provided by SESS to teachers of children with special educational needs. In addition, SESS facilitated an average of 250 specific Literacy and Numeracy seminars for the years 2011 to 2015.

The National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) delivers a workshop programme for newly-qualified teachers (NQTs). Their primary literacy programme concentrates on teaching and managing a reading lesson and the primary numeracy workshops places emphasis on developing good practice in mathematics teaching. The key reference for these workshops is Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020.

The Department does not record the number of teacher substitute days which are specific to Literacy and Numeracy events.

The PDST personnel and programme costs together with SESS personnel costs for the training referenced above are set out in the table. The total annual programme cost for SESS is in the region of €2 million. It is not possible to extricate programme costs which are specific to literacy and numeracy support from this total.

Year	Cost
2011	2.78m
2012	3.54m
2013	5.03m
2014	5.11m
2015	5.49m

## **PDST programme of support**

### **School Support**

PDST have provided tailored in-school Support every year for Primary Literacy including Gaeilge and Primary Numeracy.

### **Workshops and Seminars**

Primary Literacy (including Gaeilge)	Year
English as an Additional Language (EAL) Workshops for Primary	2011
Link Teacher Information Seminars for Principals	2012
Link Teacher Information Seminars for Principals	2012/2013
ICT in literacy Workshops	2012
Guided Comprehension Workshops – Teaching for Meaning	2012
Literacy Link Teacher: Literacy Link Seminars Days 1 and 2 Literacy Link Cluster Meetings	2013/2014
Literacy Workshops: Writing 1 and 2 Reading Fluency Guided Reading Running Records	2013/2014
Literacy Capacity Building Initiatives: Learning Support Facilitator Training Learning Support Seminars Learning Support Workshops First Steps Facilitator Training First Steps Workshop 1 & 2	2013/2014



Primary Literacy (including Gaeilge)	Year
PDST National Literacy Event	2013/2014
Reading Recovery IPD and CPD	2013/2014 2014/2015 2015/2016
Primary Gaeilge: Nascmhúinteoirí: Séimineáir to Nascmhúinteoirí- litearthacht Gaeilge & BéarlaCnuasghrúpaí do NascmhúinteoiríCeardlanna: Tuiscint	2013/2014
Gaeilge-Ceardlanna An Ghaeilge Ó BhéalTuis-cintScríobhleabhairCruinneasSeachtain na Gaeilge	2014/2015
CruinneasGaeilge agus an Plean Feabhsúcháin ScoileAn Cur Chuige CumarsáideachCiorcal ComhráGaeilge ó BhéalScribhneoireachtSeachtain na Gaeilge	2015/2016
Primary Literacy Workshops Reading Fluency Work-shopsThe Writing Process and Writing GenrePhonologi-cal AwarenessWord Study 1Word Study 2	2014/2015
Literacy Local Capacity Building: Training of trainers -Learning SupportLearning Support Seminars (delivered by trained tutors aboveLocal Capacity Building: First Steps LiteracyLiteracy Link Teacher Communities of Practice	2014/2015
Primary Literacy WorkshopsPhonological Awarenes-sOral LanguageWord StudyReading FluencyCluster meetingsTeam Teaching for Literacy National Literacy ConferenceAdditional workshops provided according to local needs (EAL, the Writing Genre, Guided Reading, Running Records)	2015/2016
Primary Language Curriculum	
2 hour information seminarFull day primary language seminar	2015/2016

Primary Numeracy	Year
Link Teacher Information Seminars for Principals	2012
Numeracy Link Teacher 2 day Seminars	2012/2013
ICT in numeracy Workshops	2012
Numeracy Link Teachers: Numeracy Link Teacher Seminars Days 1 & 2/Séimineáir to Nascmhúin-teoiríNumberShape & Space	2013/2014
Numeracy Link Clusters/cnuasghrúpaíWorkshops: Problem Solving Mental Maths	2013/2014
Primary Numeracy Workshops Mental maths (Addi-tion & Subtraction)Mental maths(Multiplication and Division)Numeracy Link Teacher Communities of PracticeInfant mathsMaths Recovery Training (day 1 & day 2)Numeracy National ConferenceNumeracy Summer Course – Infant Maths	2014/2015

Primary Numeracy	Year
Primary Numeracy Workshops Infant Maths Number Shape and Space Problem Solving with Measures Team Teaching for Numeracy Additional Workshops for Local Needs (Problem Solving, Infant Maths, Mental Maths) National Numeracy Conference Numeracy Summer Course Maths Recovery IPD and CPD	2015/2016
Primary School Self-Evaluation	
Primary: School Self-evaluation Seminars	2013/2014
School Improvement: Improving Literacy through SSE Day 1 School Improvement: Improving Literacy through SSE Day 2 School Improvement: Improving Literacy through SSE Day 2	2014/2015
School Improvement: Improving Literacy through SSE Gaeilge Lá 1 School Improvement: Improving Literacy through SSE Gaeilge Lá 2 School Improvement: Improving Literacy through SSE Gaeilge Lá 3	2014/2015
School Improvement: Improving Numeracy through SSE Day 1 School Improvement: Improving Numeracy through SSE Day 2 School Improvement: Improving Numeracy through SSE Day 3	2014/2015
Primary SSE for newly appointed principals	2015/2016
Cross Sectoral School-Self Evaluation	
Cross-sectoral : SSE Data Gathering workshops	2013/2014
Cross-sectoral : SSE Data Gathering workshops	2014/2015
Cross-sectoral : SSE Data Gathering workshops	2015/2016

### Site Acquisitions

109. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the details of the approved purchase of land at a location (details supplied) by Carlow Institute of Technology; the time and details of the deposit that was put down on the land; the person with whom the deposit was placed with; if the purchase agreement was signed; if so, the person that signed it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53422/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department has been, and remains, supportive of the proposed acquisition by IT Carlow of a site in Wexford for the development of a new purpose-built campus. We continue to work closely with the Higher Education Authority and IT Carlow in that respect.

Given that options for progressing the IT Carlow campus in Wexford are still being considered, and given the commercial sensitivities associated with land acquisitions generally, I am not in a position to comment any further on the Deputy's question.

### School Accommodation Provision

110. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the application by a school (details supplied) in County Donegal for an ASD unit and additional

accommodation will be prioritised; if the remaining stages of the application will be approved without further delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53424/17]

111. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department's building section will include a school (details supplied) in his department's major building programme; if not, the reasons for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53425/17]

112. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the rapid projected increase in student numbers for a school (details supplied); his plans to provide additional accommodation for the school to cater for the additional 185 student intake projected for September 2018; the timeline for delivery of the additional accommodation for the school and plans to include necessary planning permission requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53426/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I can confirm that the school referred to by the Deputy has recently submitted an application to my Department for significant additional accommodation. To facilitate the assessment of the application my Department will be in contact shortly with the ETB for clarification both in relation to the projected increase in pupils numbers, from 863 pupils in school year 2017/18 to 919 pupils in school year 2018/19, and the proposed long term pupil enrolment position of the school. When the assessment process has been completed a decision on the application will be conveyed to the school authority.

I can also confirm that approval was given by my Department to the school in question for a two classroom ASD Unit in March 2016. A request was received from the ETB for an increase in the floor area to provide a link corridor to the existing building. This request is currently being considered and a decision will be conveyed to the school authority as soon as this process has been completed.

### **Immigration Status**

113. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to investigate and allow for renewal of stamp 4 permission to be granted to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53269/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a request for further permission to remain in the State was received on 13 October 2017 from the persons concerned. These are currently receiving attention and Unit 2 Residence Division will be writing to them very shortly.

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

### **Immigration Status**

114. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position re-

garding persons (details supplied) that are awaiting a decision on their status; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53272/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the matters raised are currently under review with a view to contacting the family concerned shortly. It is expected that a decision will be issued in the coming days.

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.

### **Road Traffic Offences Data**

115. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 138 of 21 March 2017, 469 of 26 July 2017 and 556 of 7 November 2017, if the report is now available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53323/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The position in relation to conviction statistics has already been clarified to the Deputy in the responses to Parliamentary Question Nos. 138 of 21 March 2017, 469 of 26 July 2017 and 556 of 7 November 2017; namely that the Courts Service is not in a position to match the prosecutions specified in the Deputy's question to court results. It follows that it is similarly not possible to ascertain the number of driver licence numbers recorded for the offence referred to in the question, where the offence specified results in a conviction.

A report has again been requested from the Garda authorities in relation to statistics on drivers detected with blood alcohol content levels of between 50mg and 80mg for the years in question and I can assure the Deputy that I will provide this information directly on receipt of a Garda report.

### **Road Traffic Offences Data**

116. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 86 and 87 of 17 May 2017, 528 of 26 July 2017 and 559 of 7 November 2017, the number of those summonses not served in 2015 and 2016 that were reissued; further to the statement that a summons struck out not served can be reissued at the request of An Garda Síochána, the details of same; if this is normal practice; the policies in place to enable a Garda to decide to have a summons reissued or not; if that report is now available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53324/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I have again requested a Garda report on the matters referred to in the Deputy's questions and will contact the Deputy directly on receipt of a Garda report.

### **Road Traffic Offences Data**

117. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 555 of 7 November 2017, if the An Garda Síochána report is now available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53325/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I have been informed by the Garda authorities that the table details the number of FCNs issued in respect of persons detected for driving while holding a mobile phone; the total number of unpaid FCNs which have been forwarded to the Courts Service for summons; and additional FCN statistical breakdowns, for the period 2015, 2016 and to 31 October 2017.

Number of FCNs issued in respect of persons detected for driving while holding a mobile phone\*

	2015*	2016*	to 31 October 2017*
No. of FCNs Issued	28,777	28,121	24,102
No. of FCNs (Penalty Points) Paid	22,657	22,288	17,494
No. of Paid (Payment Clearing)	0	0	63
No. of FCNs Terminated	647	490	565
No. of FCNs sent to the Courts Service	5,335	5,230	3,427
No. of FCNs Statute Barred	47	38	11
No. of Manual/Company Summons	91	75	42
No. within Active Interval	0	0	2,244
No. Awaiting Notification (Printing)	0	0	81
No. Awaiting National Juvenile Office Decision/ Printing	0	0	14
No. of Summons Ready	0	0	161

\*Statistics provided are provisional, operational and subject to change and are valid to 31 October 2017.

### Road Traffic Offences

118. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 713 of 20 June 2017, 548 of 26 July 2017 and 562 of 7 November 2017, if the report is now available; when a number (details supplied) will be included on the C(T)68 form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53326/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, the enforcement of road traffic legislation is an operational matter for An Garda Síochána, in which I have no direct role.

I am informed that the collision report form C(T) 68 currently has a field within it to note the number of drivers breathalysed at the scene of a collision. I understand that a change request has been made by the Assistant Commissioner Roads Policing and Major Event/Emergency Management and IT design to ensure that Dräger Devices numbers and readings are captured.

My Department has sought an update from the Garda authorities, as to whether this change

request has been actioned, and I will contact the Deputy directly on receipt of a Garda report in relation to this matter.

### **Garda Reports**

119. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 577 of 26 July 2017 and 567 of 7 November 2017, if the report is now available on the number of persons that were charged for copies of Garda abstracts and statements since 1 January 2017; the amount of these charges in view of the fact that the Policing Authority has provided these figures to a road safety group; the number of persons that have been reimbursed to date; if the information requested from An Garda Síochána is now available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53327/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will be aware that the Garda Commissioner is the Accounting Officer for the Garda Vote and is responsible for setting the level of fees applicable in relation to certain services. As Minister, I have no direct role in the matter.

I am informed by the Garda Authorities that persons involved in road traffic collisions, their legal advisers or insurers or other interested parties may, on written request, be supplied with an abstract of the Garda report in respect of the collision, copies of statements of witnesses and sketches or maps of the scene. Abstracts and statements are not normally supplied until any criminal proceedings are concluded and, in the case of fatal traffic collisions, until the inquest concerning the death has been completed by the Coroner.

I understand that the fees charged are generally designed to recoup administrative costs incurred in the preparation and processing of such requests, that they are kept under on-going review, and that the following arrangements apply with effect from 1 January 2017 in respect of applications received after that date:

- fees in respect of fatal road traffic collisions will be waived (one copy per applicant);
- fees in respect of road traffic collisions resulting in serious injury will be capped at €1,000 (one copy per applicant);
- in circumstances where the investigation of a road traffic collision remains ongoing and criminal proceedings are being contemplated or have already been initiated, or in circumstances where an Inquest has not been completed by the Coroner, abstracts will not be supplied. However, a reduced or amended abstract form containing 'appropriate information' as provided for in section 106(4) of the Road Traffic Act 1961, as amended, will be provided free-of-charge;
- the following fees will be payable in respect of applications in respect of road traffic collisions resulting in material damage:

Item	Fee
Collision Reports	
Forensic Collision Report – Full Report	€400
Rough Data – Per Page	€40
Copy of Scale Plan – Other than that as provided as part of full report	€50
Copy of Vehicle Examination Report(Unless provided as part of full report)	€70



Item	Fee
Photographs	
From Digital Camera (per disc)	€30
A4 Index Sheet	€20
Photographs (1st Photograph)	€25
Each Subsequent photograph	€5
Abstract of Report	€60
Copy of Statement	€40

I am aware that the Garda authorities informed the Policing Authority in September that An Garda Síochána had identified some 28 cases of people being mistakenly charged for abstracts and that appropriate reimbursements would be made. They have provided the following details of fees that are being refunded in accordance with the new arrangements.

Collision Type	Applications	Total Fee imposed	Refund
Fatal Collision	30	€19,340	€19,340
Serious Injury	3	€3,060	€60
Total	33	€22,400	€19,400

### Garda Reports

120. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 346, 347, 348 and 349 of 20 September 2017 and 570 of 7 November 2017, if the report is now to available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53328/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I have again requested a report from An Garda Síochána in relation to the following matters outlined in Parliamentary Question Nos. 346, 347, 348 and 349 of 20 September 2017 and your subsequent question number 570 of 7 November 2017:

- 346 - “the number of arrests, prosecutions and convictions for careless driving and or anti-social driving by each district in 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017”;

- 347 - “the number of arrests, prosecutions and convictions for careless driving and or anti-social driving in and around Clonmel, County Tipperary in each of the years 2014 to 2016 and to date in 2017”;

- 348 - “the way in which careless driving and or anti-social driving, including boy racer driving behaviour and events, are being policed across the county; his plans to improve policing of same”;

- 349 - “the way in which careless driving and or anti-social driving, including boy racer driving behaviour and events, are being monitored and halted across the country; his plans to improve this area of road safety”;

- 570 - “further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 346, 347, 348 and 349 of 20 September 2017”.

I can assure the Deputy that I will be in contact directly on receipt of a Garda report.

**Garda Reports**

121. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question Nos. 246 of 12 July 2017, 113, 114, 115 and 116 of 28 September 2017 and 571 of 7 November 2017, if the report is now available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53329/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Garda authorities that the number of ‘test purchasers’ used in any given test purchasing operation is not centrally recorded on PULSE. Parental/Guardian consent and agreement forms are required for each operation and are retained locally at each District. Consequently, An Garda Síochána is not in a position to provide the information requested as it would require a disproportionate amount of Garda time and resources to collate the data requested.

The test-purchasing of intoxicating liquor, as governed by section 37C of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 1988 (as inserted by section 14 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2008) came into operation on the 1 October, 2010 by virtue of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2008 (Commencement) Order 2010, Statutory Instrument Number 449 of 2010. In accordance with Section 37(c) of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2008, licensed premises are selected for the purposes of the application of this section, on the basis of location of the premises, complaints received by An Garda Síochána relative to such premises; the number and kind of contraventions (if any) of the Licensing Acts 1833 to 2008 relating to the premises and / or the clientele attracted to the premises, or any combination thereof.

The consent of the parent or guardian of a person who is at least 15 years of age but under the age of 18 years is required, in writing, to allow him or her be sent into a licensed premises for the purpose of purchasing intoxicating liquor therein. As advised in responses provided previously to the Deputy, the welfare of test-purchasers involved in the test purchasing operations is paramount. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is relevant in this context.

Article 3 of the Convention provides that the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children, and administrative measures shall be appropriate to ensure each child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her wellbeing, taking into account the rights and responsibilities of his or her parents or guardians. Institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the established standards, particularly for safety, health, the number and suitability of staff, and competent supervision.

Reflecting the terms of this Convention and national policy objectives set out in the Children First National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children (“Children First Guidelines”), the highest possible level of protection for the test purchaser is required.

Accordingly, when considering the deployment of minors/children for the purpose of a ‘test-purchase’ operation, members of An Garda Síochána are required to have regard to the following:

- If at any time during test purchasing operations, a test purchaser indicates that he or she does not wish to continue, or shows signs of distress, the operation must be halted immediately;
- If, while in the care of An Garda Síochána, a test-purchaser is injured or suffers loss or damage to his or her property, the incident must be reported without delay to the parent or guardian and the Superintendent in whose area the operation has taken place;
- Test-purchasing operations are to be organised in such a way as to avoid, as far as possible,

the test-purchaser being called as a witness in court proceedings. As a general rule, a witness statement need not be taken from the test-purchaser since a member of An Garda Síochána will accompany the test-purchaser at all times and witness any purchase which may take place. The required witness statement can therefore be provided by the member of An Garda Síochána in any court proceedings arising from test-purchasing operations. Nevertheless, in exceptional circumstances, the test-purchaser may be required to attend court as a witness;

- Parental or guardian agreement and consent for the participation of a test-purchaser must be obtained.

Furthermore, members of An Garda Síochána conducting test-purchasing operations should satisfy themselves that:

- the safety and welfare of the test-purchaser has been fully considered;
- any risk has been properly explained to and understood by the test-purchaser;
- a risk assessment has been undertaken; and
- a record is kept of the operation.

If, at any point, a member of An Garda Síochána involved in the operation considers that it is necessary to halt the operation in order to avoid harm to the welfare of the test-purchaser, the member should do so.

Divisional Officers in the cited Divisions have indicated that while efforts have been made since the enactment of the legislation, including in the years subject of the Deputy's Question, to conduct test-purchasing operations it has proved difficult to source suitable candidates to act as test-purchasers. When parents have been approached to seek approval to participate in such purchasing operations, such approval was not forthcoming from parents who, while supportive of such initiatives, do not wish their children to be involved, or exposed to any potential risks resulting from such participation.

Efforts continue to be made to encourage parents to allow their children to participate in operations while, simultaneously, the relevant provisions of the legislation, including the sale or supply, or purchase and consumption of alcohol to / by persons under 18 years of age, continuing to be closely monitored and enforced, with prosecutions for such offences recorded in many Garda Divisions, without the necessity to utilise test-purchasing operations, which would, preferably, to ensure best outcomes, be intelligence-led.

In other Garda divisions and Districts, through high visibility patrols and engagement with young people, through various activities, including sport, it is the position that the purchase of intoxicating liquor by persons under 18 years of age is not a significant problem, as a result of other proactive policing methods deployed in such District / Divisions, particularly during holiday periods, examination / result times, and other festive periods, when persons under 18 years may attempt to purchase alcohol.

The situation continues to be monitored by local Garda Management, in conjunction with the respective Regional Assistant Commissioners, in the context of the ongoing analysis of complaints and crime-trends taking into consideration information / intelligence gathered through routine policing, whereupon the requirement to deploy test-purchasing initiatives will again be re-visited, with a view to identify suitable candidates whose parents are will to permit their participation.

## Road Traffic Offences

122. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 56 of 1 June 2017, if the change indicated has been completed; if the Courts Service has started issuing summonses containing the updated requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53330/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy is aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998, management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions, which include the provision of information on the courts system.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that the change to the wording on the summonses following the amendment of Section 22 of the Road Traffic Act 2002 was completed and implemented with effect from 26 June 2017 and since then summonses have been issued with the revised wording.

## Road Traffic Offences Data

123. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 489 of 7 November 2017, the number of road traffic collisions in 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017 in which there was a serious injury and in which the drivers involved were tested for alcohol at the scene; if testing did not take place at the scene, the reason therefor for the same period; if the report is now available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53331/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, the enforcement of road traffic legislation is an operational matter for An Garda Síochána, in which I have no direct role.

However, my Department has again sought the information requested by the Deputy from the Garda authorities and I will contact the Deputy directly once this is to hand.

## Departmental Agencies Data

124. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the divisions and agencies under the remit of his Department and its agencies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53333/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The information requested by the Deputy can be found on the “About Us” section of my Department’s website. For ease of reference I have also attached an organisation chart for my Department.

[<a href="/debates%20authoring/webattachments.nsf/0/109F94723F9FF862802581F5005EF907/\$File/ATT25773.png?openelement">Chart</a>]

## Departmental Operations

125. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of deep dives, including the date, agency and division, undertaken by his Department pursuant

to the Toland report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53334/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy is aware, the Toland Report (Recommendation 7(a)(i) – Page 15) recommended that “the Department’s Management Advisory Committee [now the Management Board] should do a deep dive into 3 divisions/agencies per month so that each is subject to annual review.”

During 2015, my Department’s Management Board undertook its first full year rotation of the new Annual Overview process and each body was covered during the year. In 2016, the Board conducted a review of the learning during the first year and examined ways to further improve the process, including alignment with my Department’s Corporate Governance Standard for Justice and Equality Bodies, which frames how the Department approaches its governance relationship with the Bodies under its aegis. Following that review, the Board established a sub-group on Agency Governance in March 2016 which conducts an annual overview of all the bodies under the Department’s aegis, including adherence to the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, and reports to the Board on key issues. The sub-group meets up to eight occasions annually conducting a review of a number of bodies at each meeting. Following each meeting a detailed report is submitted to the Management Board for discussion and review.

The total number of deep dives conducted since 2014 to date is 93 as follows:

Agency	Date Completed
Irish Film Classification Office	31 March 2015
Property Services Regulatory Authority	31 March 2015
International Policy Division	28 April 2015
Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service	28 April 2015
National Disability Authority	28 April 2015
Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner	28 April 2015
Refugee Appeals Tribunal	28 April 2015
Crime and Security	19 May 2015
Equality and Integration	19 May 2015
Insolvency Service of Ireland	26 May 2015
Legal Aid Board	26 May 2015
Private Security Authority	26 May 2015
Property Registration Authority	26 May 2015
An Garda Síochána	23 June 2015
Criminal Law Reform	21 July 2015
Policing Division	21 July 2015
Prisons and Probation Policy	21 July 2015
Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission	29 July 2015
Charities Regulatory Authority	15 September 2015
Civil Law Reform	22 September 2015
Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal	22 September 2015
Forensic Science Ireland	29 September 2015
Courts Policy	06 October 2015
Courts Service	06 October 2015
Office of the Data Protection Commissioner	20 October 2015
Parole Board	20 October 2015

Agency	Date Completed
Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission	10 November 2015
Office of the State Pathologist	10 November 2015
Garda Inspectorate	24 November 2015
Parole Board	24 November 2015
Corporate Affairs	08 December 2015
Irish Prison Service	08 December 2015
Probation Service	08 December 2015
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission	15 December 2015
Mental Health Criminal Law Review Board	15 December 2015
Criminal Assets Bureau	23 February 2016
Office of the Inspector of Prisons	23 February 2016
Legal Aid Board	25 April 2016
Office of the Data Protection Commissioner	25 April 2016
Insolvency Service of Ireland	25 April 2016
Property Services Regulatory Authority	25 April 2016
Irish Film Classification Office	25 April 2016
Irish Prison Service	30 May 2016
Probation Service	30 May 2016
Parole Board	30 May 2016
Mental Health Criminal Law Review Board	30 May 2016
Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal	30 May 2016
Courts Service	05 September 2016
Valuation Office	05 September 2016
Property Registration Authority	05 September 2016
Ordinance Survey Ireland	05 September 2016
Forensic Science Ireland	05 September 2016
Office of the State Pathologist	05 September 2016
Charities Regulatory Authority	24 October 2016
Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner	24 October 2016
Refugee Appeals Tribunal	24 October 2016
Private Security Authority	24 October 2016
National Disability Authority	24 October 2016
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission	24 October 2016
Criminal Assets Bureau	05 December 2016
Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission	05 December 2016
Garda Inspectorate	05 December 2016
International Protection Office	09 January 2017
Legal Services Regulatory Authority	09 January 2017
Policing Authority	09 January 2017
An Garda Síochána	09 January 2017
Irish Prison Service	27 February 2017
Probation Service	27 February 2017
Parole Board	27 February 2017
Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal	27 February 2017



Agency	Date Completed
Mental Health Criminal Law Review Board	03 April 2017
Insolvency Service of Ireland	03 April 2017
Property Registration Authority	03 April 2017
Ordnance Survey Ireland	03 April 2017
Valuation Office	03 April 2017
Private Security Authority	15 May 2017
Property Services Regulatory Authority	15 May 2017
Office of the Data Protection Commissioner	15 May 2017
Charities Regulatory Authority	15 May 2017
International Protection Appeals Tribunal	26 June 2017
Irish Film Classification Office	26 June 2017
National Disability Authority	26 June 2017
Garda Inspectorate	11 September 2017
Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission	11 September 2017
Criminal Assets Bureau	11 September 2017
Policing Authority	09 October 2017
An Garda Síochána	09 October 2017
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission	06 November 2017
Forensic Science Ireland	06 November 2017
Office of the State Pathologist	06 November 2017
Courts Service	04 December 2017
Legal Aid Board	04 December 2017
Legal Services Regulatory Authority	04 December 2017

### Departmental Communications

126. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the communications protocol governing communications between his Department and An Garda Síochána will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53335/17]

128. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps being taken to improve departmental oversight of An Garda Síochána; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53337/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 126 and 128 together.

A new Corporate Governance Assurance Agreement was drawn up between my Department and An Garda Síochána and signed on 20 November 2017. The Agreement has due regard to the revised 2016 edition of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, and replaces the Governance Framework Document signed on 29 July 2016.

The Agreement is available on my Department's website ([www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie)) and a copy has been forwarded to the Public Accounts Committee for its information.

It sets out the broad governance and accountability framework within which An Garda Síochána operates, and defines key roles and responsibilities which underpin the relationship between An Garda Síochána on the one hand and the Department, the Minister and the Govern-

ment on the other.

The Agreement reflects the current statutory position in accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005 and will be updated as necessary, and at least every three years.

Among the Garda commitments listed in the Agreement is a commitment to ensure that effective governance and risk management frameworks are in place in the organisation and an undertaking to keep these frameworks under review to ensure their continued effectiveness.

Also, the Agreement sets out the requirement for at least 2 Governance meetings between the Department and An Garda Síochána per annum as well as providing that such meetings will afford both organisations the opportunity to address any matters arising out of the operation of the Agreement such as:

- any specific policy issues pertaining to An Garda Síochána;
- any matters that should be brought to the attention of the Minister including—
- any matter that might be comprehended by section 41 of the Act of 2005,
- any internal governance-related matter,
- any matter relating to An Garda Síochána that might have been the subject of, or might give rise to, public commentary or scrutiny,
- any matter that might impact on the reputation of An Garda Síochána.

These meetings are in addition to other governance meetings that take place between the Department and An Garda Síochána. They meet in a number of different formations on a monthly or quarterly basis to support the formal governance arrangements. The monthly meetings concern:

- financial management;
- resource needs;
- progress on implementation of the Reform Programme.

The quarterly meetings that include representatives of the Policing Authority (either as participants or observers) concern the ICT programme and resources generally. In addition, there are also quarterly meetings concerning the provision of security services.

In relation to communications between the Department and An Garda Síochána, the Agreement provides that both parties agree to:

- commit to proactive and timely communications, cooperation and information-sharing on service delivery;
- support the effective achievement of agreed targets, as well as the promotion of partnership, responsiveness and mutual cooperation in their ongoing interactions;
- consult and to keep each other fully apprised on all matters of mutual relevance, including regular meetings, at least monthly, with a view to monitoring expenditure, progress on the Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 and in relation to resources generally;
- work together closely for the purposes of the estimates process; and
- support prompt and timely responses to correspondence, information requests and related

matters.

In this context, arrangements are in place for the development of an Information-sharing Protocol between the Department and An Garda Síochána to reflect and formalise the practical day-to-day arrangements under the Agreement. It is intended that the Protocol will be finalised by the end of 2017 and I understand that work is very well advanced in this context.

The Deputy will, of course, be aware that the Commission on the Future of Policing, chaired by Kathleen O'Toole, is at present undertaking a comprehensive examination of all aspects of policing including—

- all functions currently carried out by An Garda Síochána, and
- the full range of bodies that have a role in providing oversight and accountability for their activities; namely, the Policing Authority, the Garda Síochána Inspectorate, the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, the Department of Justice and Equality and the Government.

Among the issues comprehended by the terms of reference, are:

- the structures and management arrangements required for the most effective delivery of policing (including all functions currently carried out by An Garda Síochána),
- the appropriate composition, recruitment and training of personnel,
- the culture and ethos of policing,
- the appropriate structures for oversight and accountability, and
- the legislative framework for policing.

The Commission is expected to report in September 2018.

### **Garda Reform**

127. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the details of all Garda reform programmes; the extent to which each has been rolled out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53336/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Government approved a major Five Year Reform and High Level Workforce Plan for An Garda Síochána in July 2016 based on the implementation of the Garda Inspectorate's recommendations contained in its report "Changing Policing in Ireland" in tandem with the delivery of the Government's commitments in relation to increasing the overall Garda workforce. The Commissioner's Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 will be the vehicle through which the agreed recommendations of the Inspectorate Report, the bulk of which have been accepted, will be implemented. The Modernisation and Renewal Programme draws on over 40 previous reports into An Garda Síochána including from the Garda Inspectorate. It also draws on the views of the Garda workforce as well as the public. It is an ambitious five year programme designed to effectively modernise and reform An Garda Síochána.

The Policing Authority, at the request of my predecessor is performing an important task in overseeing this process and in supporting the Gardaí in implementing the reform agenda. It is required to report to me, as Minister, on a quarterly basis. To date it has submitted three reports which have been published on my Department's website at [www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie). I would refer the

Deputy to the Authority's third progress report for a comprehensive assessment of progress on the implementation of the recommendations. The report notes welcome progress in a number of areas including:

- significant progress in the work of the Garda Victims' Services Offices,
- the establishment of four Protective Services Units on a pilot basis,
- the completion of the Garda Deployment Survey,
- positive progress in the development and implementation of the Divisional/functional model of policing,
- progress on ICT projects,
- the Executive Director of Strategy and Transformation has taken up his post,
- good progress on the implementation of improved risk management.

As the report makes clear, however, improvements are required in respect of the governance of the reform programme and the pace of implementation.

I have made it clear to the Commissioner that the concerns highlighted by the Authority must be addressed and the reform programme accelerated to ensure the best possible policing services to the people of Ireland. To support An Garda Síochána in addressing the concerns highlighted by the Authority a structured process of engagement is in place between my Department and An Garda Síochána to identify and agree corrective actions. This engagement includes formal monthly meetings at senior official level with the responsible Deputy Commissioner, the Chief Administrative Officer and the recently appointed Executive Director of Strategy and Transformation of An Garda Síochána.

The progress report highlights the critical importance of the Policing Authority's role in delivering the full implementation of the reform agenda. It brings a capacity to engage intensively with An Garda Síochána and maintain a sustained focus on what is actually being done and what is being achieved on the ground. Its reports reflect this rigorous approach and provide a very solid basis for engagement between my Department and An Garda Síochána in relation to the programme.

I am confident that the reform plan that is being pursued by An Garda Síochána, supported by the Government and overseen by the Policing Authority, has the capacity to achieve this. It will not be done overnight but as I have made clear, the implementation of the ambitious reform programme must continue and, indeed, must move at a greater pace, to ensure the best possible policing services to the people of Ireland.

*Question No. 128 answered with Question No. 126.*

### **Garda Data**

129. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí attached to each Garda divisional public order unit in each of the years 2015, 2016, and to date in 2017; and the number of vans attached to each divisional public order unit in each of the years 2015, 2016, and to date in 2017. [53355/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will ap-

preciate, 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 have sought the information requested by the Deputy from the Commissioner and I will write to the Deputy on receipt of same.

### **Policing Authority Reports**

130. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his attention has been drawn to a report a report by CAO on An Garda Síochána regarding the use by the former Garda Commissioner of a personal email account (details supplied); if he or persons in his Department have received such a report; if persons in his Department have been in correspondence with members of An Garda Síochána by email or other forms of correspondence regarding this report; if he has not received such a report, if he will request same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53362/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As I set out in my reply to the Deputy's recent question in relation to the Policing Authority, the establishment of the Authority represents one of the most significant developments in policing since the foundation of the State. It constitutes a major element of the comprehensive programme of justice reform which is being delivered by the Government, aimed both at ensuring continuing confidence in the work of An Garda Síochána and at supporting the women and men of the service in the work they do on our behalf every day.

The Authority's role is to oversee the performance of the Garda Síochána in relation to policing services, to promote public awareness of policing matters and to promote and support the continuous improvements in policing in Ireland. Its mission is to drive excellent policing through valued and effective oversight and governance.

In its independent oversight role in relation to An Garda Síochána, the Policing Authority has engaged actively with An Garda Síochána on the issue of ICT usage, including the use of personal email accounts. The Authority discussed the matter with the Commissioner at its meetings on 24 November 2016 and on 27 January 2017. At the latter meeting, a report provided to the Authority by An Garda Síochána was discussed. The minutes of these meetings are available on the Policing Authority website [www.policingauthority.ie](http://www.policingauthority.ie).

I am satisfied that the issue has been appropriately dealt with by the Authority and that no further action is warranted on my part at this time. My Department has therefore neither requested nor received a copy of this report. As I stated in my previous reply, I continue to have complete confidence that the Authority, with its wealth of experience and expertise, will contribute to making An Garda Síochána a modern, efficient and accountable policing service.

### **Courts Service Properties**

131. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status and plans for future use for the vacant courthouses in Bray, Wicklow and Baltinglass in view of the fact that a project (details supplied) is awaiting a premises in Bray to carry out vital mental health services for young persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53365/17]

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

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me, as follows, in relation to the vacant courthouses in Bray, Wicklow and Baltinglass:

#### Bray

The Courts Service has advised that the old courthouse situated on the Boghall Road in Bray has been vacant since 2006 when court sittings and services relocated to alternative accommodation leased by the Courts Service in the town centre. As part of the ongoing management of its property portfolio the Courts Service seeks to dispose of properties that are surplus to its requirements in accordance with its own internal policy and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's policy on property acquisitions and disposals.

The Courts Service has further advised that it initially considered the property on Boghall Road to be surplus to its requirements and since 2006 has engaged with a number of parties from public, private and community sectors who expressed an interest in acquiring or using the property, including the Jigsaw organisation in 2016. However, because of the fact that the existing courthouse in Bray town centre is operating at or near capacity, the Courts Service considered it prudent to assess whether the building on Boghall Road could have a role in the delivery of court services in the Bray area in the future. This assessment is ongoing at present.

#### Wicklow

The Courts Service has informed me that the courthouse in Wicklow town has been closed for a number of years on health and safety grounds. However, as part of the Courts Service provincial capital building programme, one of the objectives is to extend and refurbish the courthouse in Wicklow town to provide a significantly larger 4 courtroom venue together with a range of facilities for staff, the judiciary, persons in custody, jurors, legal professionals, other state agencies and members of the public.

The Courts Service has indicated that while detailed planning or design work has not yet commenced, it has purchased a number of adjacent properties, some of which will be demolished in order to create a larger site capable of accommodating a courthouse building on the scale envisaged. The Courts Service is, at present, considering bringing forward some of these demolition works.

Wicklow town is one of a number of provincial city/county town venues nationwide still requiring new or upgraded courthouse accommodation and collectively these venues will be the next priority for investment in courthouse facilities outside the capital.

#### Baltinglass

The Courts Service has also informed me that it stopped using Baltinglass Courthouse as a court venue in 2014. This courthouse was never vested by the Courts Service and it remains in the ownership of Wicklow County Council therefore the future use of the courthouse is a matter for the Council.

### Community Alert Programme



132. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to outline financial support his Department offers to community alert schemes; his plans for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53377/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for Government underlines the need for close engagement between An Garda Síochána and local communities. This is an essential feature of the strong community policing ethos which has long been central to policing in this jurisdiction. The Deputy will also be aware that as part of the overall strategy to oppose criminality, the Garda authorities pursue a range of partnerships with community stakeholders; for example, the well established Community Alert Programme and the highly successful Garda Text Alert Scheme to name but a few.

Community policing is at the heart of An Garda Síochána. It provides a means of recognising that every community – both urban and rural – has its own concerns and expectations. In this regard I welcome the strong emphasis placed by An Garda Síochána on the Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021, on further developing and supporting the community policing ethos of the organisation so that Gardaí spend more time in the community, gaining public confidence and trust and providing a greater sense of security. Proposed initiatives include the establishment of local Community Policing Teams (CPTs) headed by an Inspector and made up of Gardaí from across a range of areas to proactively work with the community to prevent and detect crime; and the establishment of Community Safety Fora in every District comprising local Gardaí, local communities and key stakeholders.

Since the Community Text Alert scheme was launched in September 2013, it has developed as an important crime prevention mechanism with over 700 local groups involving in excess of 130,000 subscribers and with an estimated 200,000 text messages sent each month under the scheme. Every Garda Division, rural and urban, now offers the text alert service and An Garda Síochána has published guidelines to assist in the establishment and operation of local groups.

The Deputy might wish to note that funding from my Department is not used to provide direct assistance to local Community Alert (or Text Alert) Groups.

Community Alert funding is allocated by my Department for the employment and associated costs of the national Community Alert programme, including the employment of regional Development Officers. These Development Officers, operating in Muintir Na Tíre, provide support to Community and Text Alert schemes and offer advice on how to establish new schemes. The long-standing view has been that this is the best use of the resources available to the Department to support effective community crime prevention actions.

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

### **Garda Data**

133. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí assigned to the dedicated drugs unit in counties Cavan and Monaghan for the past ten years in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53380/17]

**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.

As the Deputy will be aware all Gardaí have a responsibility in the prevention and detection of criminal activity whether it be in the area of drug offences crime or otherwise. I can assure the Deputy that An Garda Síochána continues to pro-actively and resolutely tackle all forms of drug crime in this jurisdiction.

In line with the Policing Plan, An Garda Síochána's National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau, which was established in 2015, continues to lead out the policing strategy for tackling drugs by demand reduction and supply reduction strategies. In this regard the Bureau continues its policy of working with Garda Divisional Drug Units nationwide in tackling supply reduction at local level.

This work is further supported by other national units, including the Criminal Assets Bureau, in targeting persons involved in the illicit sale and supply of drugs. This approach allows for the co-ordinated use of Garda resources in tackling all forms of organised crime, including illicit drug activity nationwide. Multi-disciplinary approaches are also utilised to ensure that those involved in illicit activity are effectively targeted including through the use of the proceeds of crime legislation, money laundering legislation and the powers of the Criminal Assets Bureau. I am informed that this approach adopts good practice in implementing a co-ordinated use of Garda resources and in utilising available criminal law to its fullest extent in tackling all forms of organised crime, including drug trafficking.

We have also seen unprecedented international cooperation between An Garda Síochána and policing services in other jurisdictions leading to important arrests and drug seizures.

Underpinning all these measures is this Government's commitment to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and deter crime. I am informed by the Commissioner that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, close to 1,600 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources he needs to allow him to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across the organisation including the Divisional Drugs Units.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the number of Gardaí allocated to the Cavan/Monaghan Divisional Drug Units for the past 10 years to 31 October 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, is as set as follows:

**Strength Cavan/Monaghan Divisional Drug Unit**

Year	Gardaí assigned
2007	9
2008	11
2009	10
2010	11

Year	Gardaí assigned
2011	8
2012	5
2013	0
2014	0
2015	0
2016	0
2017*	6

\*As of 31 October 2017

### Departmental Investigations

134. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to the trawl of documentation in his Department regarding the O'Higgins commission that was ordered by An Taoiseach, the reason there were only seven email accounts of departmental officials trawled through for that request; his views on whether this was appropriate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53382/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I wish to refer the Deputy to the report published on the website of the Department of Justice and Equality on Monday 27 November 2017. The report outlined the search of documentation which was undertaken, which related to 13 officials (one retired).

As the Deputy will be aware, I have welcomed the fact that there will be an independent review of the response of my Department to requests for documents from the Disclosures Tribunal. The terms of reference for that review were published yesterday. The terms of reference include an examination of the actions taken by the Department in response to all requests for documents directed to the Department, including whether the Department has now carried out appropriately comprehensive search and retrieval to identify any relevant material for the tribunal and any concerns which arise. The review may also advise on what further measures, if any, might be taken to address those concerns. The Department will of course implement any further measures arising from the review.

### Family Reunification Policy

135. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the details of the proposal to support family reunification for 500 Syrian families that have fled the conflict there; if it will include Syrian families currently in the EU that have a spouse or parent that is not Syrian; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53390/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** On 14 November last, together with my colleague, the Minister of State with special responsibility for Equality, Immigration and Integration, David Stanton T.D., I announced a new scheme of family reunification in support of refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and their families.

I would like to emphasise to the Deputy that this new scheme is aimed at assisting family members of all refugees from established conflict zones and not just refugees from Syria. This new Family Reunification Humanitarian Admission Programme (FRHAP) will form part of the Government's commitments under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP). The

Family Reunification Humanitarian Admission Programme (FRHAP) will see, over a two year period, up to 530 immediate family members of refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection from established conflict zones come to Ireland as part of our overall commitment to accept 4,000 persons under the IRPP.

This humanitarian admission programme is an initiative of the Government for the benefit of the families of those in receipt of international protection in Ireland and is not part of any EU programme. The FRHAP will be operated under Ministerial discretionary powers and it will be in addition to the family reunification provisions provided for in the International Protection Act 2015. Officials in my Department are in consultation with the UNHCR and other stakeholders on developing the full operational details of the programme.

I will also continue to apply my discretion in the area of family reunification for those outside of the International Protection process in the ways described in the Non-EEA Policy Document on Family Reunification and scheme operated by INIS.

Additional details on the operation of the FRHAP programme will be announced on the websites of the Department of Justice and Equality ([www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie)) and the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service ([www.inis.gov.ie](http://www.inis.gov.ie)) in the coming period.

### **Commission on the Future of Policing Reports**

136. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has formally requested an interim report from the Commission on the Future of Policing; if so, when this request took place; if he has received such a report; if so, if he will publish same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53402/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland which began its work in May, is undertaking a comprehensive examination of all aspects of policing including all functions currently carried out by An Garda Síochána including community safety, security and immigration.

The themes it is to address are:

- the structures and management arrangements
- the appropriate composition, recruitment and training of personnel,
- the culture and ethos of policing, and
- the full range of bodies that have a role in providing oversight and accountability for their activities; the Policing Authority, the Garda Inspectorate, the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, the Department and Government.

The Commission is to report by September 2018 and it may, in accordance with its terms of reference bring forward immediate proposals and rolling recommendations for implementation that it considers are required to be addressed in the short-term, and in advance of its final report.

The Commission is, of course, an independent body and it is important that it be free to carry out its work in whatever manner it sees fit. For that reason I have not requested an interim report from the Commission but it is of course open to the Commission to submit such a report, if it decides to do so.

## **Departmental Communications**

137. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will make public on his Department's website all email correspondence between the former Garda Commissioner and officials in his Department during the summer of 2017, concerning their position as Commissioner and their possible retirement (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53403/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** It is generally not the practice to comment on or publish material relating to an individual's personal employment situation.

## **Garda Operations**

138. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on whether it is normal practice for An Garda Síochána to monitor the activities of political parties (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53434/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I can assure the Deputy that it is not the normal practice for An Garda Síochána to monitor the activities of political parties.

The functions of An Garda Síochána in respect of providing policing and security services to the State are set out in the Garda Síochána Acts 2005-2015. In conducting those functions, there may on occasion be a requirement for policing deployments in respect of managing public gatherings or demonstrations that are political in nature that might include monitoring such gatherings or demonstrations in order to ensure public or road safety or to facilitate the conduct of such meetings or demonstrations.

I should emphasise, of course, that if persons involved in political parties were suspected of engaging in unlawful activity the Gardaí would have a duty to pursue them for that activity as they would pursue any other person suspected of unlawful activity.

In respect of the particular event to which the Deputy refers in her Question, I have sought a report from the Garda Authorities and I will communicate further with her directly when that information is to hand.

## **Garda Data**

139. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in each Garda station in the Cork west, Cork city and Cork north divisions; and the number of gardaí in each of those three divisions. [53454/17]

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

I am informed by the Commissioner that in regard to the deployment of Garda personnel,

a distribution model is used which takes into account all relevant factors including population, crime trends and the policing needs of each individual Garda Division.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime. To achieve this the Government has put in place a plan for an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians. We are making real, tangible progress on achieving this goal.

I am informed by the Commissioner that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, just under 1,600 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, of whom 38, 20 and 20 have been assigned to the Cork City Division, the Cork North Division and the Cork West Division respectively. Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, will increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - a net increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

I am also pleased that Budget 2018 maintains this high level of investment in the Garda workforce and ensures 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. This will see Garda numbers reach the 14,000 mark by the end of 2018.

In addition, a further 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. There are plans to strengthen the Garda Reserve with new Reserves expected to commence training early in 2018.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources needed to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Division, including the Co. Cork Divisions.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the Garda strength in the Co. Cork Divisions as of 31 October 2017, the latest date for which figures are readily available, is as set as follows:

#### **STRENGTH OF THE CORK CITY DIVISION 31 OCTOBER 2017**

DISTRICT	STATION	TOTAL
ANGLESEA STREET	ANGLESEA STREET	291
	BLACKROCK	23
	BRIDEWELL	28
	TOTAL	342
GURRANABRAHER	BALLINCOLLIG	18
	BLARNEY	16
	CARRIG NA BHFEAR	1
	GURRANABRAHER	57
	TOTAL	92
MAYFIELD	GLANMIRE	22
	MAYFIELD	43
	WATERCOURSE ROAD	45
	TOTAL	110
TOGHER	BISHOPSTOWN	19



DISTRICT	STATION	TOTAL
	CARRIGALINE	20
	CROSSHAVEN	2
	DOUGLAS	19
	PASSAGE WEST	2
	TOGHER	56
	TOTAL	118
CORK CITY TOTAL		662

**STRENGTH OF THE CORK NORTH DIVISION 31 OCTOBER 2017**

DISTRICT	STATION	TOTAL
FERMOY	BALLYNOE	1
	CASTLETOWNROCHE	2
	FERMOY	62
	KILDORRERY	1
	KILWORTH	1
	MITCHELSTOWN	20
	RATHCORMAC	1
	WATERGRASSHILL	2
	TOTAL	90
MALLOW	BUTTEVANT	1
	CHARLEVILLE	20
	DONERAILE	2
	GLANTANE	1
	KANTURK	22
	LISCARROLL	1
	MALLOW	61
	MILFORD	1
	NEWMARKET	2
	TOTAL	111
MIDLETON	BALLYCOTTON	1
	CARRIGTWOHILL	2
	CLOYNE	1
	COBH	36
	KILLEAGH	1
	MIDLETON	51
	WHITEGATE	1
	YOUGHAL	23
	TOTAL	116
CORK NORTH TOTAL		317

**STRENGTH OF THE CORK WEST DIVISION 31 OCTOBER 2017**

DISTRICT	STATION	TOTAL
BANDON	BALLINEEN	2
	BALLINHASSIG	2
	BANDON	82
	INNISHANNON	1
	KILBRITTAIN	1
	KINSALE	16
	TIMOLEAGUE	1
	TOTAL	105
BANTRY	BANTRY	37
	CASTLETOWNBERE	5
	DRIMOLEAGUE	1
	DURRUS	1
	GLENGARRIFF	1
	KEALKIL	1
	SCHULL	4
	TOTAL	50
CLONAKILTY	BALTIMORE	1
	CLONAKILTY	39
	DRINAGH	1
	DUNMANWAY	10
	SKIBBEREEN	12
	TOTAL	63
MACROOM	BAILE BHUIRNE	2
	BÉAL ÁTHA AN GHA- ORTHA	2
	BOHERBUE	1
	COACHFORD	1
	CROOKSTOWN	11
	MACROOM	40
	MILLSTREET	13
	RATHMORE	1
	STUAKE	1
	TARELTON	1
	TOTAL	73
CORK WEST TOTAL		291

**Departmental Reviews**

140. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the terms of reference of the review of his Department's handling of the trawl of emails relating to the Disclosures Tribunal; if the failure to search the former Minister's email account and the accounts of her advisers will be included in the terms of reference of the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53496/17]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, I have welcomed that there will be an independent review of the response of my Department to requests for documents from the Disclosures Tribunal. The terms of reference for that review were published yesterday. The terms of reference include an examination of the actions taken by the Department in response to all requests for documents directed to the Department, including whether the Department has now carried out appropriately comprehensive search and retrieval to identify any relevant material for the tribunal and any concerns which arise. The review may also advise on what further measures, if any, might be taken to address those concerns. The Department will of course implement any further measures arising from the review.

### **State Aid**

141. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the extension of EU state aid rules to regulatory alignment between the EU and Northern Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53198/17]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Government has always been clear that its absolute preference is to maintain the closest possible trading relationship between the UK and EU, including Ireland, based on a level playing field. This is an aim shared by the EU, and by the UK itself.

Phase 2 of the Article 50 negotiations will address how the overall framework for a future relationship between the EU and the UK might look. This will include the issue of alignment with EU State aid rules for the UK. I am encouraged to note that the UK has been a strong supporter of State aid rules to date.

### **Trade Promotion**

142. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which her Department continues to pursue market opportunities for Irish products globally; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53485/17]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Ireland is one of the world's most open, export-based economies. For Ireland, with a small domestic market, expansion to other markets is a prerequisite for our economic prosperity. Export growth in Ireland has been exceptionally strong in recent years, reaching a new record level of €259 billion last year.

The Government is strongly committed to promoting diversified export markets for our indigenous sectors, particularly in light of the potential economic impacts of Brexit. It is imperative that companies maximise opportunities to not only sustain and grow their exports to the UK but also to continue to diversify their export base.

Enterprise Ireland has an established process for working with companies as they identify opportunities and begin to enter new markets. Enterprise Ireland's overseas structure, through its network of 33 overseas offices and its extended Pathfinder (Trade Consultant) network, has the capability of providing client companies with the appropriate support in markets where there are identified opportunities matched by client capability and demand. The activities of Enterprise Ireland's overseas network are supported by the Market Research Centre and Strategic Marketing Unit based in Dublin, along with a range of financial and capability developments

supports aimed at helping client companies to compete and win sales in overseas markets.

Ireland's membership of the EU is absolutely critical in terms of global market access, not only to the 27 markets within the single market, but also to third country markets through EU negotiated Free Trade Agreements. Irish businesses benefit significantly from Free Trade Agreements with third countries in a range of ways, including the elimination of market access barriers and red tape and the abolition of tariffs. These existing EU agreements and new trade deals will continue to be very important for Ireland in terms of promoting Irish products around the world. Ireland works actively and closely with the European Commission and other institutions in the negotiation of these agreements, and my Department is responsible for promoting our national policy positions in this regard.

Earlier this year, the Government published a new trade strategy, 'Ireland Connected: Trading and Investing in a Dynamic World' which commits Ireland to deepening our enterprise resilience by intensifying our connections in existing markets and diversify to new markets; capturing new sectoral opportunities; and build more Irish companies of scale. In this context, Enterprise Ireland is consistently working with client companies focusing on enhancing their competitiveness, capability and levels of innovation to assist them to diversify into new markets. The Strategy also supports an extensive programme of ministerial-led trade missions, as part of the drive towards market diversification.

In August, the Government announced plans to double Ireland's global footprint by 2025 which will further expand our investment and trade footprint in foreign markets through the provision of increased resources for diplomatic missions and state agency offices overseas.

### Trade Promotion

143. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which her Department has redoubled its efforts to establish new markets inside and outside the European Union for Irish products in order to compensate for the consequences of Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53492/17]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Promoting diversified export markets in light of the potential impacts of Brexit is a key priority for my Department and its agencies. It is imperative that Irish companies respond to the challenges Brexit will bring now, and do not wait until the Brexit negotiations are complete. This will include maximising opportunities to not only sustain and grow their exports to the UK, but also to diversify their export base to other markets.

Released on the 9th November, "Building Stronger Business – responding to Brexit by competing, innovating and trading" sets out the work under way, and planned, by my Department and its Agencies in response to Brexit, including supports available to companies to help them prepare for Brexit. It also describes our research programme designed to inform that response.

In terms of increasing Ireland's Global Footprint, my Department has secured an additional €3 million in funding to enable the Department and its agencies recruit a further 40 to 50 staff worldwide (on top of 50 additional staff secured in Budget 2017). These additional resources will be focused on helping Irish exports grow their international sales, diversify their markets and secure new investments in Ireland.

Enterprise Ireland is working directly with clients most exposed to Brexit and continues to provide the necessary supports and expertise to help them navigate immediate challenges. It's

2017-2020 'Build Scale, Expand Reach' Strategy aims to increase the diversification of client exports into new markets, with two-thirds of exports going beyond the UK. The diversification strategy is focused on geographical markets, and on diversifying into new market segments.

In May 2017, Enterprise Ireland launched a new Eurozone Strategy to assist Irish exporters increase exports in Eurozone countries by 50%, from €4 billion to €6 billion by 2020. This will be accompanied by a new 'Irish Advantage' communications campaign which will target Eurozone buyers to buy Irish innovation in key Brexit impacted sectors such as med-tech and engineering.

In addition, enhanced programmes of minister-led trade missions and bilateral visits overseas will deepen existing trade and investment relationships and forge new linkages across a range of markets.

My Department will also continue to work to promote expansion of the EU's portfolio of Free Trade Agreements to encourage market-deepening and expansion to new markets for Irish based enterprises.

### **Brexit Staff**

144. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department has recruited technical experts in legal and trade negotiations in respect of Brexit. [50328/17]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** My Department has not specifically recruited technical experts in legal and trade negotiations in respect of Brexit, but has drawn on the experts in these areas across the Department. These officials are best placed to deal with the Department's response to the UK's decision to leave the European Union, and have been assigned to additional postings in the areas across the whole Department that have been most impacted by Brexit.

On the day that the referendum result was known a Co-ordination Group on Brexit was established in my Department, consisting of the CEOs of both IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland, and relevant enterprise, Single Market and trade officials from the Department to oversee implementation of our response to the emerging national, UK and EU developments. This Group, which I Chair, meets regularly and oversees the management of our response to the referendum result. It also facilitates regular engagement with the Agencies and Offices of the Department impacted by Brexit.

My Department has also established a Senior Officials Group on Brexit, chaired by the Secretary General, which supports the Management Board of the Department in ensuring a coherent and co-ordinated approach to Brexit across all areas of the Department.

To facilitate and encourage regular and comprehensive dialogue with enterprise, my Department also established an Enterprise Forum on Brexit and Global Challenges. Membership includes 13 representatives from enterprise groups and I Chair the Forum, with meetings held every 6-8 weeks. This Forum provides an opportunity for the Department to share emerging research and policy approaches with the enterprise sector and to receive feedback on proposals. It also gives enterprise a platform to share their research and feedback from companies with the Department and to raise issues of concern, to highlight opportunities, and to suggest policy responses.

In 2016, my Department established a dedicated Brexit Unit to deal with the challenges

of Brexit. The Unit is led at Assistant Secretary level within the EU Affairs and Trade Policy Division, and is supported by one Principal, three Assistant Principals, two Higher Executive Officers and one Clerical Officer. This Unit leads on the coordination of the Department's policy and operational responses to Brexit, including our approach to the negotiations within the EU and bilateral relations with the UK. The Brexit Unit oversees research and analysis being undertaken by the Department and its Agencies and monitors research published by external bodies to better inform our policy response. The Unit also leads on engagement with a broad range of stakeholders to inform and validate our response to Brexit.

### **Hospital Charges**

145. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to ensure that the charge of €80 which some hospital groups have imposed on persons with haemochromatosis requiring venesection will be ceased (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53509/17]

149. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the charging of persons with haemochromatosis requiring venesection in certain hospital groups (details supplied); his plans to issue an instruction regarding ceasing the charge being imposed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53265/17]

150. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health his plans to address the difficulties facing persons with haemochromatosis regarding the charge of €80 which certain hospital groups have imposed on those persons requiring venesection; his views on the petition signed by over 2,400 persons to have this charge removed; if he is in receipt of this petition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53266/17]

157. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the new charges being imposed by certain hospital groups for the carrying out of venesection for persons with haemochromatosis; his views on whether it is acceptable that this can result in charges of up to €320 per month for these persons; if he will request the HSE to end these charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53313/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 145, 149, 150 and 157 together.

The Health Act 1970 (as amended) provides that all people ordinarily resident in the country are entitled, subject to certain charges, to public in-patient hospital services including consultant services and to public out-patient hospital services. Under the Health (In-Patients Charges) (Amendment) Regulations 2008, a person who has been referred to a hospital for an in-patient service, including that provided on a day case basis, will have to pay the statutory daily charge, currently €80 per day, up to a maximum of €800 per year. On this basis, where venesection is classed as a day case procedure and is not carried out in an out-patient setting, the public in-patient charge applies.

I confirm receipt of the petition in favour of removing the in-patient day case charge for haemochromatosis patients. I am aware of this issue and have asked officials in my Department to examine it, including the particular points made by the Irish Haemochromatosis Association, and to provide me with advice.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**



146. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a hospital appointment. [53260/17]

**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.

As the information requested by you comes under the remit of the Health Service Executive your correspondence has been sent to the HSE who will arrange for a reply to issue to you directly.

### **Mental Health Services Provision**

147. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Health his plans to establish a mental health service (details supplied) in County Wicklow in particular its search for a premises in Bray; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53261/17]

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

### **Medicinal Products Availability**

148. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if Vimizim will be sanctioned for persons (details supplied) immediately; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53262/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the pricing and reimbursement of the community drug schemes.

As the particular issue raised relates to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

*Questions Nos. 149 and 150 answered with Question No. 145.*

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

151. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health when funding for the provision of diabetes testing devices such as the freestyle Libre sensor (details supplied) will be provided. [53271/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

152. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the length of time a person (details supplied) will be waiting on an orthopaedic procedure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53275/17]

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

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

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

### Hospital Appointments Administration

153. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53276/17]

**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.

As the information requested by you comes under the remit of the Health Service Executive your correspondence has been sent to the HSE who will arrange for a reply to issue to you directly.

### Respite Care Services Funding

154. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Health his views on the impact the recently announced €4.5 million fund to reform disability services will have on providing full-time respite care to children and adults in County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53296/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The €4.5 million funding is part of the Service Reform Fund which was established by the Department of Health, the Atlantic Philanthropies, the HSE and Genio to support the implementation of reforms in disability and mental health services in Ireland. The Fund represents a total combined investment of €45 million by the Department and Atlantic to reconfigure existing services towards more person-centred supports which are also more transparent, accountable and cost-effective, in line with government policy.

Funding will be allocated under three streams:

- Community Living – supporting people to move from congregated settings or institutions to the community; to have improved living arrangements in the community; and to lead self-directed, meaningful lives, engaged in local and mainstream activity. This will be aimed at those who are moving from an institution or those at risk of institutionalisation.

- Reform of day services to person-centred supports – supporting alternative ways of meeting the work, education, training and recreation needs of people with a disability within mainstream, community settings.

- Alternative Respite – developing a range of non-institutional respite options for individuals and their families.

Regional HSE Community Healthcare Organisations will invite consortia - including people with disabilities, family members, service providers and community groups - to work together to develop proposals for funding. Consultations will take place over the coming months with service users, families and service providers across Ireland to develop realistic, sustainable plans to reconfigure services.

Funding will be subsequently awarded by the Genio Trust through a rigorous application process jointly assessed by the Genio Trust and the HSE.

### **Medical Card Applications**

155. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application by persons (details supplied) for a medical card; and when they can expect a decision on their case. [53298/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, I have referred this query to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Nursing Staff Recruitment**

156. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health the number of the 7.5 nursing posts promised for children with life limiting or complex needs in County Donegal that have been filled; the reason some families cannot avail of nursing care particularly for night cover and end up with agency staff which may jeopardise continuity of care; the way in which he will ensure that every family with a child suffering from life limiting or complex needs will receive the continuity of care provided for by nursing staff specifically allocated to families; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53299/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

*Question No. 157 answered with Question No. 145.*

### **Dental Services Provision**

158. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide a long-term replacement dental service in Ballymahon, County Longford; and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [53315/17]

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

### **Health Services Staff**

159. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a second carer in Merlin Park in order to be able to transfer them from care in County Wicklow to County Galway. [53317/17]

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

### **Vaccination Programme**

160. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health if there can be a genetic predisposition in some girls receiving the gardasil HPV vaccine that may be unable to clear out the vaccine chemicals in their system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53321/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** All medicines, including vaccines are subject to ongoing review and evaluation of all available data from a range of sources, including systematic scientific literature review, to consider any impact that their data may have on the overall assessment of the benefits and risks of a medicinal product. Taking into account the totality of the available information, the benefits of the HPV vaccines continue to outweigh their risks. The safety of these vaccines continues to be monitored at EU level through the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and its expert committees, which includes representatives from member state competent authorities such as the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA).

The HPRA is responsible for monitoring the safety and quality of all medicines including vaccines that are licensed in Ireland and operates a national adverse reaction reporting system, which members of the public and healthcare professionals are encouraged to submit any suspected adverse reactions through this system. All Reports received by the HPRA are routinely transmitted to the EMA's adverse reaction database for inclusion in global signal detection and monitoring activities. It is not appropriate for me to speculate on the interaction between a person's genetic make-up and how this impacts on their metabolising of licensed medicines. The Patient Information Leaflet provides information on the vaccine, its uses and on any precautions that require advice from a healthcare professional before it is administered

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

161. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the 20 -month waiting lists for transgender persons awaiting appointments with a HRT specialist endocrinologist; his views on the waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53360/17]

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

162. **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. [53373/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

### **Drug Treatment Programmes Data**

163. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health the number of beds available and the locations of each for those wanting to detox from tablets such as Z-drugs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53375/17]

**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.

### **Local Drugs Task Forces Funding**

164. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the funding provided to the mid-west regional drug and alcohol forum, formerly known as drugs task force, per annum in each of the years 2008 to 2016, and to date in 2017; the amount budgeted for 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53378/17]

165. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the funding provided to the mid-west regional drug and alcohol forum, formerly known as drugs task force, budgeted for 2018; when this funding is expected to be confirmed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53379/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 164 and 165 together.

Local and Regional Drug and Alcohol Task forces are funded by both the Department of Health and the HSE. The table shows the funding for the Drug and Alcohol Forum from 2008 to 2017. It should be noted that from 2008 to 2013 the Mid West Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force/Forum was funded by my Department under the Drugs Initiative Fund. The reduction in the budget allocated from the Drugs Initiative Fund in the years 2014 to 2017 reflects the fact that my Department transferred funding of approximately €1.26 million in respect of a number of projects in the Mid West Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force/Forum to the HSE in 2014. The HSE maintained this allocation in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
DoH Al-location	1,537,241	1,548,888	1,576,095	1,533,540	1,496,428	1,451,535	147,982	147,982	147,982	147,982
HSE Al-location							1,260,007	1,260,007	1,260,007	1,260,007
Total	1,537,241	1,548,888	1,576,095	1,533,540	1,496,428	1,451,535	1,407,989	1,407,989	1,407,989	1,407,989

It is intended that all Local and Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Forces will be notified of their 2018 funding allocations by the Department and the HSE as soon as the HSE National Service Plan for 2018 has been approved by the Minister for Health.

### Drugs Payment Scheme Coverage

166. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health the reason Versatis 5% medicated plaster, Lidocaine, has been removed from the drugs payment scheme and the medical card (details supplied) [53386/17]

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

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

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

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

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

Under the protocol, all patients who were receiving antivirals for shingles were automatically approved for the lidocaine medicated plaster for three months. No action was required by GPs and the patient's pharmacy was notified of his or her approval status.

These patients were identified and automatically registered on the HSE-PCRS system for three months and continued to receive the treatment from their pharmacy until 30 November



2017. However, from 1 December 2017, non-shingles patients will no longer get this item under the community drugs schemes. The HSE has produced information leaflets for patients and advised GPs on treatment alternatives.

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

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

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

### **Capital Expenditure Programme**

167. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the detail of the pre-committed funding for planned future capital projects relating to health in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53387/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Health capital funding was outlined in the recently published Public Service Estimates for 2018 and the HSE is currently developing its Capital Plan for 2018 - 2021.

The Government is also preparing a new 10 year National Investment Plan for the period 2018-2027, which will be published alongside and in support of the forthcoming new National Planning Framework, to sustain national economic and social progress over the long term.

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

168. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter in relation to persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53388/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** On Tuesday 3 October 2017 the Government approved the drafting of a Bill on assisted human reproduction (AHR) and associated areas of research. Officials in my Department are engaging with the Office of the Attorney General in relation to the process of drafting this Bill.

In relation to the issue of public funding and AHR treatment, I have received and responded to correspondence from the persons concerned on this matter. Officials in my Department are developing policy options for a potential public funding model for AHR treatment. Once I have had the opportunity to consider this policy options paper I will bring a Memorandum to Government for a model of public funding for AHR treatment for the Government's consideration and decision. It is important to note that any funding model that may ultimately be introduced would need to operate within the broader regulatory framework set out in the AHR Bill and a model of care for AHR.

As you may be aware, the Health Research Board's (HRB) evidence review of international public funding models for AHR was published earlier this year. This evidence review examines the associated costs and benefits for the funder, provider and patient, the criteria for accessing

the public funded service and the basis for these criteria in different jurisdictions. An analysis of the HRB evidence review will feed into the development of policy options for a potential public funding model for AHR treatment by my officials.

While IVF treatment is not currently provided by the Irish public health service, there is some support available in that patients who access IVF treatment privately may claim tax relief on the costs involved under the tax relief for medical expenses scheme. In addition, a defined list of fertility medicines needed for fertility treatment is covered under the High Tech Scheme administered by the HSE. Medicines covered by the High Tech Scheme must be prescribed by a consultant/specialist and approved by the HSE 'High Tech Liaison Officers'. The cost of the medicines is then covered, as appropriate, under the Medical Card or Drugs Payment Scheme.

### **Respite Care Services Provision**

169. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to ensure a person (details supplied) is provided with the respite hours in respect of two children in October 2016 and which has not been provided to date, notwithstanding they are both autistic; if in that context, he will investigate the level of respite care hours available in County Westmeath in the context in which the HSE is unable to provide the hours allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53394/17]

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

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

170. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53395/17]

**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.

As the information requested by you comes under the remit of the Health Service Executive your correspondence has been sent to the HSE who will arrange for a reply to issue to you directly.

### **Nursing Home Accommodation Provision**

171. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if a suitable high dependency nursing home placement will be allocated to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53399/17]

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

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

172. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an urgent consultant's appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53401/17]

**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.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

173. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Health his views on the provision of transportation to day services for persons with autistic spectrum disorder that require full-time care, especially before and after turning 18 years of age in the Dublin south west area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53419/17]

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

The provision of transport to adults with a disability attending HSE-funded day services is not a core health service, and the HSE endeavours to ensure that all service users access public transport, including rural transport services, if possible. This is in keeping with the principle of mainstreaming with a clear focus on ensuring persons with a disability have access to the normal range of services and participate in community life as far as possible. In general, day service users are in receipt of disability allowance and are automatically entitled to the Free Travel Pass, so there should be no additional cost burden at an individual level.

However when all other options are exhausted, and a person cannot avail of a day service because they do not have transport to attend, some transport is provided by disability service providers on a case by case basis as resources allow. Service providers are continuously re-

viewing their transport arrangements to ensure that they are used as effectively and equitably as possible within available resources. This may result in the provision of a reduced quantum of service to the service user, and the HSE does its best to provide transport in certain cases without reducing services. Service providers continue to keep the matter of transport under review.

The HSE has committed to establishing a high level cross divisional working group this year to rationalise the provision of transport and to maximise equitable access and efficiencies. The HSE also intends to liaise with the National Transport Authority and disability service providers to explore ways in which the Authority's services could assist people with disabilities. The National Transport Authority has a total of 17 Transport co-ordinating units called Local Link which provide safe secure and reliable Public Transport services in local and rural areas of Ireland through a combination of scheduled Public Transport services and door to door services. The HSE plans to explore the opportunities these units may provide to people with disabilities to access day services and participate in the social, educational and economic life of their local communities. Transport issues for persons under 18 years with a diagnosed disability are a matter for the Department of Education and Skills.

As the remainder of the Deputy's relates to an individual case, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Respite Care Services Provision**

174. **Deputy Colm Brophy** asked the Minister for Health his views on the provision of respite services for carers in the Dublin south west area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53420/17]

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

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

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

### **Hospital Consultant Contracts**

175. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Health if all consultants are in line with the 80:20 ratio of public and private appointments in CUH; and the monitoring that takes place on this in the hospital [53427/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

### **Hospital Consultant Contracts**

176. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Health if all consultants are in line with the 80:20 ratio of public and private appointments in Mercy UH; and the monitoring that takes place on this in the hospital [53428/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter.

### **Ambulance Service Funding**

177. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the extra funding that will be provided to the ambulance service in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53436/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I am happy to confirm that increased funding will be made available for the continued development of the National Ambulance Service in 2018, the detail of which will be set out in the National Service Plan, 2018. The allocation of this additional funding to service developments by the HSE must await the finalisation of the National Service Plan which is currently under way.

### **Air Ambulance Service Funding**

178. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the funding he will provide to the air ambulance service in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53437/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I am happy to confirm that increased funding will be made available for the continued development of the National Ambulance Service in 2018, some of which has been earmarked for the development of aeromedical services. The allocation, by the HSE, of this additional funding to specific service developments, must await the finalisation of the National Service Plan which is currently underway.

### **HSE Data**

179. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health when the HealthStat programme within the HSE commenced; if the programme is still active; if not, when it was terminated; the person or body that was responsible for the development of healthstat; the overall cost of the HealthStat programme; the annual cost of the HealthStat programme for each year of its existence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53438/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospitals Expenditure**

180. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the cost of the hospital inpatient enquiry scheme in each of the years 2006 to 2016 and to date in 2017; the annual cost in each of the years 2006 to 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53439/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, I have referred

this to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy

### **Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage**

181. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if access to the long-term illness scheme for persons affected by hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53440/17]

186. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if discretionary access to the long-term illness scheme will be provided for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53501/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 181 and 186 together.

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

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

### **Health Services Provision**

182. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Health the services that were provided to persons in Mosney, County Meath in 2007 through the on-site medical centre; and the professions that were represented there. [53455/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** As the issue raised by the Deputy relates to a service matter, I have referred it to the Health Service Executive for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Dental Services Provision**

183. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if dental treatment will be expedited for a person (details supplied). [53456/17]

**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.

### **Orthodontic Services Provision**

184. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of braces for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53457/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, it has been re-



ferred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Hospital Appointments Administration**

185. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for a cataract operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53500/17]

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

The scheduling of appointments for patients is a matter for the hospital to which the patient has been referred. Should a patient's general practitioner consider that the patient's condition warrants an earlier appointment, he or she should take the matter up with the consultant and the hospital involved. In relation to the specific case raised, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

*Question No. 186 answered with Question No. 181.*

### **Medical Card Applications**

187. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if a discretionary medical card will be provided for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53502/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, I have referred this query to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Local Drugs Task Forces Funding**

188. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health his plans to take action regarding the need for prompt approval of crucial funding a group (details supplied) to ensure that those living in urban and rural areas of counties Carlow and Kilkenny have equal access to important supports and resources; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53504/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** Local or Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Forces are responsible for allocating money for suitable projects, based on locally identified needs and priorities. Applications for funding for organisations should be made directly to the appropriate Drug and Alcohol Task Force, which in this case is South East Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force.

Contact details for Drug and Alcohol Task Forces are available at <http://health.gov.ie/healthy-ireland/drugs-policy/local-and-regional-drugs-task-forces/>.

### **European Medicines Agency**

189. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Health the role his Department had in Ireland's bid for the European Medicines Agency and his engagements with other European leaders on Ireland's bid. [50203/17]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In October 2016, the Government decided to promote Dublin as the new location for the European Medicines Agency (EMA). The Irish offer was developed by a cross-sectoral working group led by my Department, with colleagues from the Department of the Taoiseach and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, as well as representatives from the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA), IDA Ireland and other Government departments and agencies. Our bid was officially submitted to the European Council and the European Commission on 31 July 2017.

Officials in my Department also worked closely with colleagues in the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on the strategy and campaign to promote the bid and demonstrate why Dublin represented a suitable location for the EMA.

During the course of the campaign, government colleagues, Department officials, and I engaged with representatives from nearly all EU Member States. These engagements included bilaterals with health ministers across the Member States, discussions between officials at departmental level and briefings for various cross-sectoral stakeholders.

On 19 November 2017, Ireland's Permanent Representative to the European Union confirmed that Ireland was withdrawing its bid for the EMA in order to focus on the offer for the European Banking Authority, recognising the political challenge of pursuing two bids concurrently. The decision on the relocation of both agencies was taken by the General Affairs Council on 20 November, with Amsterdam being selected as the new home for the EMA.

### **TAMS Administration**

190. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to include funding for meal bins for young suckler farmers in the TAMS scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53270/17]

**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 exceeding 11,660. 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. There are no proposals at present to extend the Scheme to include meal bins for non dairy farmers.

Of the applications approved 2,900 payment claims have been received to date. Payment claims submitted continue to be paid on an on- going basis. All participants who have completed approved works are urged to submit their payment claims immediately to facilitate early payment.

### **Farm Safety**

191. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the efforts made to date by his Department to reduce incidents of farm deaths and farm accidents; the supports available to those persons living with life altering injuries as a result of an accident

on the farm; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53297/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Farm safety is a critical issue facing farming today. Statistics show that accidents on farms cause more work-place deaths than all other occupations combined.

While there are many risks in farming, farming does not have to be a dangerous occupation. Behavioural change is urgently required to minimise risk and prevent future accidents.

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) has primary responsibility for Health and Safety on Farms, while the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) is fully supportive of their work and assists in the promotion of safe farming practices.

DAFM, in conjunction with the HSA, is focused on changing farmer behaviour in relation to Health and Safety. Research (commissioned by the HSA) has shown that behavioural change is the key to reducing the level of accidents both fatal and non-fatal, on farms. The same research showed that farmers are generally aware of the risks, however, there were problems with farmers often not adhering to the safety guidance.

On-going Initiatives of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine on farm safety include the following:

- A Farm Safety Scheme was opened as part of the TAMS II round of on-farm investment schemes under the 2014-2020 RDP.

- As part of all the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Schemes it is mandatory to have completed a minimum of a ½ day farm safety course on completing the Code of Practice within the last five years.

- A mandatory Health and Safety element is included in all Knowledge Transfer Groups under the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme. These groups will directly engage in the region of 20,000 farmers with farm safety.

- ‘Health and Safety’ guidelines are included in all ‘Building Specifications,’ drawn up by the Department for the construction of agricultural buildings and structures. The guidelines give advice on best practice and legislation.

- A Farm Safety leaflet is included with the Single / Basic Payment application packs, distributed annually to over 130,000 farmers.

- In terms of assistance to farm families who have either suffered a loss or severe injury as a result of a farm accident, and who may not have experience in dealing with the type of day to day issues that might bring them in contact with the Department in relation to schemes and services, a single point of contact has been established in my Department’s Quality Customer Service Unit. Every assistance and guidance possible is provided to make contact/dealings with the Department as easy and as straightforward as possible.

Contact details for the Service are as follows:

Phone: 057 8694464

E-mail: [qualityserviceunit@agriculture.gov.ie](mailto:qualityserviceunit@agriculture.gov.ie)

- The Department is an active member of the Farm Safety Partnership Advisory Committee and is in regular contact with the Health and Safety Authority. This committee includes of members from a wide range of bodies within agriculture and looks at how to promote and

develop farm safety.

- A North South Farm Safety Group was formed in 2015, the purpose of the group is to seek ways in which the respective authorities can work together to enhance the work currently undertaken in each jurisdiction on Farm Safety. The group is supporting the sharing of information on farm safety between both jurisdictions and looking at the development of joint farm safety initiatives.

Teagasc have a Tragic Event Service for Family Farms (TESFF) to offer support to farm families. In the aftermath of tragic events on farms leading to death or serious injury, advisors will offer their support without additional cost to affected families. The key areas of support are as follows.

- Technical support to ensure that the family can make the critical management decisions in time and ensure that the farm can continue to operate at a reasonable level of performance.

- Farm Financial Business support in dealing with bankers, accountants and Revenue.

- Support in working with my Department in relation to the various Schemes and Services available to ensure that the farm continues to participate in and receive its entitlements under various schemes.

- Structural Changes to assist the farm family stabilise the farm so that it can function effectively, this may mean changing the system of farming, scaling down or employing additional hired labour.

The level of accidents is far too high on Irish farms and is something that I am particularly focused on.

### **Fodder Crisis**

192. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a transport scheme for the delivery of fodder to County Donegal and the north west will be implemented ahead of an impending fodder crisis in view of the fact that transport costs will be higher for farmers in these areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53300/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** It is clear that weather conditions over much of this Autumn have been challenging for farmers and created difficulties for farmers particularly in the Western regions and on heavier land types.

Grass growth rates through the autumn have been ahead of last year. However the poor weather resulted in cattle being housed earlier than normal in places, particularly on the heavier soils; it also affected late cut silage making operations.

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 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. Issuing of these payments commenced after 15 October.

The roll-out of balancing payments under the BPS scheme has begun and brings the total

paid under the Basic Payment Scheme to €1.106 bn, and 121,000 farmers have received a payment to date. In addition, over 90,000 farmers have been paid a total of €194m under the Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme to date. Advance payments of €100mn have issued under AEOS and GLAS scheme payments in the last few days.

In order to ensure a co-ordinated approach I recently convened a fodder group which is made up of all the main stakeholders including representatives of feed industry-co-ops, banking, farm bodies etc and the first meeting took place on Monday 11 December chaired by Teagasc.

Arising from the meeting, Teagasc are committed to assessing fodder availability in the south of the country to ascertain what supplies are still available for purchase.

Exploring these avenues means my Department will be fully informed of the situation on the ground and the best possible advice will be provided to farmers re their options.

### **Agriculture Scheme Appeals**

193. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in an agricultural appeal by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53374/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Agriculture Appeals Office has advised that a number of cases of a complex nature were required to be dealt with by the Appeals Officer dealing with the case concerned. The determination of such cases must be undertaken taking account of the legal requirements. I have been advised that every effort is being made to finalise the appeal submitted by the person named as a matter of urgency and that when all of the facts of the case have been fully considered a comprehensive decision letter will issue.

### **Afforestation Programme**

194. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the date on which the forestry appeals committee is expected to start hearing appeals regarding a case (details supplied); if committee members have been appointed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53435/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named received technical approval for her application for the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme in late September this year. A third party appeal against the decision was submitted to the Forestry Appeals Committee (FAC) and the technical approval has been suspended, pending the decision of the FAC.

It is expected that the FAC will shortly commence contacting applicants and appellants with regard to oral hearings. The FAC is an independent appeals process and until the Committee has decided on this appeal, the technical approval remains suspended.

### **Basic Payment Scheme Payments**

195. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason persons (details supplied) have had their basic payment reduced; the grounds on

which it was challenged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53453/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** An application in respect of the 2017 Basic Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 19 April 2017. During processing of this application an over claim was identified on one of the parcels declared. A letter issued on 30 June 2017 advising the person named of the over claim and of their right to seek a review.

A request for a review has not been received. An official from my Department will be in direct contact with the person named to clarify the position.

### **Herd Number Applications**

196. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a herd number for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53467/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** As per my previous response to PQ 48683/17 of 21 November, the original application for a herd number was received on 10 November and a farm inspection carried out on 13 November; additional documentation was requested at this time. Once the applicant supplies the Regional Veterinary Office with the additional documentation required the application process will proceed. To date the Regional Veterinary Office has not received any further documentation.

### **Wildlife Conservation**

197. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 414 of 5 December 2017, his plans to consider the development of a wildlife rehabilitation hospital and visitor centre in Fingal in conjunction with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the Department of Education and Skills, in view of the fact that such a proposition would be a new venture in an Irish context. [53477/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Deputy will be aware that my Department provides ex-gratia funding to organisations involved in protecting animal welfare. Applications for funding from animal welfare organisations are assessed by my Department and awards made on the basis of certain criteria, including the level and type of assistance provided by the organisation in the delivery of care and welfare services to animals and the level of funding raised by organisations from other sources to support welfare activities. Organisations applying for funding must sign up to a strict set of guidelines, be in existence for two years or more, be registered with the Charities Regulator and provide detailed accounts.

To date the organisation in question have not contacted my Department with an application for funding.

### **TAMS Administration**

198. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on possible amendments to an agricultural scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53503/17]



**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 exceeding 11,660. 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. There are no proposals at present to increase the investment ceilings.

Of the applications approved 2,900 payment claims have been received to date. Payment claims submitted 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.

### **Equine Industry**

199. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the absence of a time limit for the registration of newly born foals; if he has satisfied himself that the current arrangements are beneficial to stud owners in the collection of stud fees; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53505/17]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The timeframe for registration of equines is governed by EU legislation (Commission Implementing Regulation 2015/262). With effect from 1 January 2016, all equines born in the EU must be identified and issued with a passport no later than 12 months from the date of birth of the equine. In order to ensure that the 12 month deadline can be met, under the terms of S.I. 62 of 2016, the keeper of the equine must submit a completed application form for a passport for the equine to an appropriate approved Passport Issuing Organisation not later than 6 months from the date of the animal's birth. An equine animal cannot be moved or sold unless it is accompanied by its equine passport.

It is an offence to keep an equine animal that is not identified in accordance with equine identification legislation.

The collection of stud fees by stud owners is not within the remit of my Department, and is therefore a matter for each individual stud owner.

### **Invasive Plant Species**

200. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if approval will be given to allow for on-site incineration of invasive weeds (details supplied); his plans to counteract potential impacts of these invasive weeds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53506/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** Following discussions between the Environmental Protection Agency, Transport Infrastructure Ireland and Biodiversity Ireland, it was suggested that the level of regulation required for the management of waste arising from the cutting or excavation of invasive alien plant species may be disproportionate to the risk of environmental pollution posed by such activities.

Accordingly, in Autumn 2017, my Department sought submissions from a number of stakeholders on the possibility of an amendment to the Waste Management (Facility Permit and Registration) Regulations, 2007 (S.I. 821 of 2007) as amended, whereby treating alien invasive plant species on-site could be authorised by a local authority under a certificate of registration. Such an approach would also require an amendment to the Waste Management (Prohibition of Waste Disposal by Burning) Regulations 2009 (S.I. 286 of 2009) as amended.

My Department is currently reviewing the submissions received with a view to engaging with the waste regulatory authorities on this again issue in early 2018.

### **National Broadband Plan Implementation**

201. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a reply will issue to correspondence from a person (details supplied) regarding broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53274/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector so that today over 65% of the 2.3m premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband and this is set to increase to 77% (1.8m premises) by the end of 2018 and to 90% (2.1m premises) by the end of 2020.

In April I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan (NBP).

The Map is colour coded and searchable by address/eircode:

- The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP and are the subject of an ongoing procurement process.
- The BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services.
- The Light BLUE areas represent eir's commercial rural deployment plans to roll out high speed broadband to 300,000 premises by the end of 2018 as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with me in April.

The premises referred to by the Deputy are in an AMBER area.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. That procurement process is now at an advanced stage. "Detailed Solutions" submitted by two bidders on 26 September are being evaluated by the NBP specialist team. The next stage in the procurement process is the receipt of final tenders followed by the appointment of a preferred bidder(s) and contract signature.

As part of this procurement process, the bidder(s) will be required to submit their strategies, including timescales, for the network build and roll-out. My Department will engage with the winning bidder(s) to ensure the most efficient deployment as part of the contract.

With regards to the matters raised in the correspondence supplied by the Deputy, decisions made by private telecommunication operators relating to the roll-out and siting of infrastructure to provide high speed broadband services throughout Ireland are undertaken on a commercial basis by competing service providers operating in a liberalised market. I have no statutory role or function to intervene in the commercial decisions of private operators, and therefore cannot direct operators regarding infrastructure installation or delivery of services.

I recognise the importance of availability of high speed connectivity for all premises in Ireland and the frustration for communities and businesses that do not currently have access to this level of connectivity. Delivering connectivity to the 542,000 premises that fall within the State led intervention under the NBP remains a Government priority and my Department will engage with the winning bidder(s) to ensure the most efficient deployment as part of the contract.

In the interim, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Task force to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Task force, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department's website.

### **National Broadband Plan Implementation**

202. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to correspondence (details supplied) from a company, if consideration has been given to providing some flexibility in cases in which small sections of certain roads have not been included in the roll out of eircom. [53363/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector so that today over 67% of the 2.3m premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband and this is set to increase to 77% (1.8m premises) by the end of 2018 and to 90% (2.1m premises) by the end of 2020.

In April I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan (NBP).

The Map is colour coded and searchable by address/eircode:

- The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP and are the subject of an ongoing procurement process.
- The BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services.
- The Light BLUE areas represent eir's commercial rural deployment plans to roll out high

speed broadband to 300,000 premises by the end of 2018 as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with me in April.

Premises not in the BLUE or LIGHT BLUE areas will, as noted in the correspondence supplied by the Deputy, be brought a high speed broadband service as part of the NBP State led intervention.

Decisions made by private telecommunication operators relating to the roll-out and siting of infrastructure to provide high speed broadband services throughout Ireland are, as outlined in the supplied correspondence, undertaken on a commercial basis by competing service providers operating in a liberalised market. I have no statutory role or function to intervene in the commercial decisions of private operators, and therefore cannot direct operators regarding infrastructure installation or delivery of services.

I recognise the importance of availability of high speed connectivity for all premises in Ireland and the frustration for communities and businesses that do not currently have access to this level of connectivity. Delivering connectivity to the 542,000 premises that fall within the State led intervention under the NBP remains a Government priority and my Department will engage with the winning bidder(s) to ensure the most efficient deployment as part of the contract.

In the interim, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Task force to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Task force, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department's website.

### **North-South Interconnector**

203. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the report on the costing to the undergrounding of the proposed EirGrid North-South interconnector will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53364/17]

204. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on the concerns of communities in counties Cavan and Monaghan in relation to the north south interconnector particularly in relation to health, land devaluation, property devaluation, tourism and heritage; if this project will be placed underground; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53383/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 203 and 204 together.

On 21 December 2016 An Bord Pleanála granted planning permission for the North-South Interconnector project in Ireland. The decision concluded a lengthy planning process which included an Oral Hearing completed over eleven weeks from March to May of 2016.

Following the decision of An Bord Pleanála, I met with the local opposition groups and members of the Oireachtas in Leinster House on 8 February 2017 to listen to their point of view.

Motions were subsequently passed in both Dáil and Seanad Éireann calling on the Government to commission an independent report, incorporating international industry expertise to examine the technical feasibility and cost of undergrounding the interconnector and a number of other related issues, and a study is underway to address these issues.

In the development of the Terms of Reference for this study, my officials met with the local opposition groups to get their views on the focus of the study. The terms of reference fulfil the central point of the motions that were passed in both Houses and the study will address as much of the issues raised by the opposition groups as is practicable.

Certain impacts such as environmental and health concerns will not be assessed since the statutory planning process is the appropriate method by which such impacts are assessed and evaluated. As Minister, I have an overarching duty, unless lawfully challenging a decision, to respect the decisions of lawfully established bodies.

I also met with a number of Oireachtas members on Tuesday 16 May to update them on the progress in relation to the proposed study and for the members to provide feedback.

The impact on land and property values and the level of compensation paid in lieu of such impacts was discussed and in response to these concerns I commissioned a study on the levels of compensation provided to land and property owners in proximity to high-voltage transmission lines in a European context. The aim of the study is to provide a significant body of independently collated information on comparative practices in a number of jurisdictions.

The results of both studies are expected in Q1 2018.

### **National Broadband Plan Implementation**

205. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when fibre broadband will be rolled out in a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53441/17]

206. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when fibre broadband will be rolled out in a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53442/17]

207. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when fibre broadband will be rolled out in a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53443/17]

208. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when fibre broadband will be rolled out in a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53444/17]

209. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when fibre broadband will be rolled out in a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53445/17]

210. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when fibre broadband will be rolled out in a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53446/17]

211. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when fibre broadband will be rolled out in a location (details supplied); and if



he will make a statement on the matter. [53447/17]

212. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when fibre broadband will be rolled out in a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53448/17]

213. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when fibre broadband will be rolled out in a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53449/17]

214. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when fibre broadband will be rolled out in a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53450/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 206 to 214, inclusive, together.

The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector so that today over 67% of the 2.3m premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband and this is set to increase to 77% (1.8m premises) by the end of 2018 and to 90% (2.1m premises) by the end of 2020.

In April I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan (NBP).

The Map is colour coded and searchable by address/eircode:

- The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP and are the subject of an ongoing procurement process.

- The BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

- The Light BLUE areas represent eir's commercial rural deployment plans to roll out high speed broadband to 300,000 premises by the end of 2018 as part of an Agreement signed with me in April.

The table details percentage of premises to be covered by the State Intervention and through commercial investment in the areas identified by the Deputy.

County Name	Townland	AMBER % Premises within the NBP Intervention Area	BLUE % Premises within Commercial Operator's Area	LIGHT BLUE premises planned rural deployment
	Coolananagh, (Newcestown)	17% (8)		83%(38)
	Boggra (Newcestown)	75% (6)		25%(2)
	Dunisky	100% (76)		
	Teergay	100% (24)		
	Ballynora (Woodbrook)	78%(150)	21%(41)	1%(2)
	Curragbeg (Glenlee)	37% (25)	62% (42)	1%(1)
	Gurteenroe (Milbrook Close)	17% (102)	83% (512)	
	Kilnamartyra (Clohina)	100% (29)		



County Name	Townland	AMBER % Premises within the NBP Intervention Area	BLUE % Premises within Commercial Operator's Area	LIGHT BLUE premises planned rural deployment
Cork	An Ceapach Thiar, Baile Mhuirne	68% (17)		32% (8)
	Kilnagurteen (Masseytown)	5% (16)	95% (305)	

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company or companies who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. That procurement process is now at an advanced stage. "Detailed Solutions" submitted by two bidders on 26 September are being evaluated by the NBP specialist team. The next stage in the procurement process is the receipt of final tenders followed by the appointment of a preferred bidder(s) and contract signature.

As part of this procurement process, the bidder(s) will be required to submit their strategies, including timescales, for the network build and roll-out. My Department will engage with the winning bidder(s) to ensure the most efficient deployment as part of the contract.

In April 2017, I signed a Commitment Agreement with eir in relation to its plans to provide High speed broadband to 300,000 premises in rural areas on a commercial basis. eir has committed to completing the roll-out by the end of 2018. Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available at <http://fiberrollout.ie/eircode-lookup/>. A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my Department's website [www.dccae.gov.ie](http://www.dccae.gov.ie).

Quarterly updates on eir's rural deployment are published on this website. Following evaluation by officials from my Department of eir's Q3 update of its rural deployment of high speed broadband I can confirm that eir has met its Q3 target of 101,000 premises passed.

Prior to the roll-out of the NBP State led intervention, practical initiatives continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Task force to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Task force, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department's website.

### Bioenergy Strategy Publication

215. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 1146 of 21 March 2017, when the strategic environmental assessment of the draft national bioenergy plan, which was drafted in 2014 and has remained in draft form since, will be published and put to public consultation; and the reason for the disruption to the timeframe stated in the reply. [53480/17]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The draft Bioenergy Plan was published in 2014. There are a wide range of Government Departments, agencies and State bodies that are critical enablers for the development of bioenergy by virtue of their responsibility for areas such as forestry, agriculture, waste, re-

search funding and business development. The draft Bioenergy Plan sets out the policy areas that must be coordinated to support the development of the bioenergy sector in Ireland. It identifies a number of supply-side and demand-side measures to support the sustainable development of the sector.

Since its publication, a number of the actions set out have progressed significantly. In particular, I would note the increase of the Biofuel Obligation Rate from 6% to 8% in January 2017, the current public consultation on potential future increases in the Biofuel Obligation Rate in January 2019 and January 2020, and the approval by Government last week of a new Support Scheme for Renewable Heat.

Notwithstanding the progress made on the actions set out in the plan, the plan itself has not yet been finalised. The publication of the Energy White Paper (Ireland's Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future) and the National Mitigation Plan have provided an updated policy context. The draft bioenergy Plan is being updated to reflect these and other policy developments. An updated Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and NATURA Impact Statement (NIS) are currently being prepared. I expect the draft plan, SEA and NIS to be published early in the new year for public consultation.

### Fáilte Ireland

216. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on a matter relating to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53314/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** My Department's role in relation to tourism lies in the area of national tourism policy development. It does not become involved in the management or development of individual tourism projects, which are operational matters for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland.

While the Department provides capital funding to Fáilte Ireland for investment in tourism offerings, it does not have a role in the administration of Fáilte Ireland's tourism capital programmes. Similarly, it does not have discretionary funds at its disposal to assist with tourism proposals.

I have received separate correspondence on this matter and I have asked Fáilte Ireland to revert to the person involved. I have provided the person with a contact name in Fáilte Ireland.

I have also asked Fáilte Ireland to reply direct to the Deputy on the matter. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply from Fáilte Ireland within ten working days.

### Sports Facilities Provision

217. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be provided for the sports facilities affected by floods in County Donegal specifically in the areas of Finn valley and Inishowen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53288/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** Having visited Donegal immediately after the severe flooding incident at the end of August, I am aware of the challenges faced by a number of sports clubs in the area and have

previously stated that I am eager to assist in any way I can. In this regard, my Department made contact with relevant sports clubs impacted by the flooding but whose damage was deemed to be outside the terms of the previously announced Irish Red Cross Scheme. Responses setting out the needs of the clubs in question have been received and Minister Ross and I have decided to provide funding for these clubs. My officials will be in touch with the clubs in the coming days to finalise the exact amount required.

### **Sports Facilities Expenditure**

218. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Sligo municipal district of Sligo County Council at its meeting on 24 April 2017 unanimously adopted a motion relating to funding being specifically provided under the CLÁR and RAPID programmes (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53295/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** In relation to the college referred to by the Deputy, earlier this year my Department was made aware of local concerns relating to the continued sporting use of facilities which had previously received funding under the Sports Capital Programme. The facilities also received CLAR and RAPID funding from the then Department of Community, Rural and Gael-tacht Affairs. On foot of the concerns raised, my Department engaged in a series of correspondence with the college to seek clarification in this regard and assurances that the grant aided facilities would remain in sporting use. My Department also inspected the site in June of this year to ensure that the terms and conditions of the original grant were being adhered to. It should be noted that the concerns raised related to one particular room within the overall sports complex which was previously being used as a gymnasium.

Following this inspection, the college was asked to provide a report on the usage of the overall facility and to provide evidence of how it was proposed to continue the sporting usage of the room which was the subject of the original complaint. The college provided this material in October including details of the external users of the facility, the charges being imposed and also included evidence of efforts to secure additional users for the facilities in the future.

Accordingly, my Department is satisfied that the college is currently in compliance with the terms and conditions of the Sports Capital Programme and the deed of covenant and charge which guarantees that the facilities will stay in sporting use for a period of 15 years from the date of the payment of the last instalment of the grant. The period of the deed will expire in 2023. My Department will however, continue to monitor the usage of the facility and engage further with the college if considered necessary.

In relation to any additional educational resources required by the college, this is of course a matter for my colleague the Minister for Education and Skills.

### **Capital Expenditure Programme**

219. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount allocated for capital investment in rail infrastructure in each of the years 2017 to 2021. [53338/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** My Department provides capital funding to the National Transport Authority (NTA) for the development of public

transport infrastructure, including rail infrastructure, in the Greater Dublin Area. My Department also provides capital funding to Iarnród Éireann for the maintenance and renewal of the heavy rail network under the Infrastructure Manager Multi-Annual Contract (IMMAC), in accordance with the requirements of EU law. In 2017, capital investment of over €240 million has been provided to the NTA and Iarnród Éireann for rail infrastructure.

As the Deputy is aware, Budget 2018 provided for an increase in the multi-annual capital investment for public transport with a four-year capital envelope of €2.7 billion to 2021. Allocations from this funding envelope will become firmer in line with more detailed planning at project and programme level, but the present indicative plans are that there will be investment of over €1.5 billion in rail infrastructure for the period 2018-2021 with €280 million in 2018, €320 million in 2019, €340 million in 2020 and over €600 million in 2021.

### **Road Projects Data**

220. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expected cost, the number of years it would take to deliver and the amount allocated for upgrading the N4. [53339/17]

221. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expected cost, the number of years it would take to deliver and the amount allocated for upgrading the construction of a dual carriageway upgrade of the N14, A5, N2 and the Letterkenny and Derry to Dublin roads. [53340/17]

222. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expected cost, the number of years it would take to deliver and the amount allocated for the Limerick to Rosslare road. [53341/17]

223. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expected cost, the number of years it would take to deliver and the amount allocated for the Cork to Limerick motorway. [53342/17]

224. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expected cost, the number of years it would take to deliver and the amount allocated for the New Ross bypass. [53343/17]

225. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expected cost, the number of years it would take to deliver and the amount allocated for the A5 upgrade. [53344/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 220 to 225, inclusive, together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question in relation to the national roads in the South to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a

reply within 10 working days.

As regards the A5, the planning and implementation of the upgrade project is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland authorities. The current funding arrangements in relation to the A5 are governed by the Stormont House Agreement and Implementation Plan - A Fresh Start. This Agreement reaffirmed the Government's commitment to provide funding of £50 million for the A5 project and committed an additional £25 million to ensure that the 1st phase of the project from Newbuildings to north of Strabane could commence once Northern Ireland authorities are in a position to start work on the project. Following consideration of the Northern Ireland Planning Appeals Commission report on the scheme, the Department for Infrastructure announced its decision to proceed with the A5 Western Transport Corridor scheme last month.

### **Road Projects Data**

226. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expected cost, the number of years it would take to deliver and the amount allocated for the Narrow Water Bridge development. [53346/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Options are still being appraised in accordance with the terms of the Fresh Start Agreement in relation to the proposed bridge at Narrow Water and there is, therefore, no cost estimate or time frame available for the completion of the project.

### **Ports Development**

227. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expected cost, the number of years it would take to deliver and the amount allocated to deepen a berth at Rosslare Europort from seven metres to nine metres. [53347/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Deputy is aware that Rosslare Europort is unique among the State owned ports as it is not a company operating under the Harbours Acts, but is instead operated as a division of Iarnród Éireann.

I have therefore forwarded the Deputy's questions to Iarnród Éireann for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Ports Development**

228. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the feasibility of deepening the port of Waterford has been examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53348/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Port of Waterford currently maintains depths at 6.5 metres below datum (i.e. at low water). Hence, at high tide, the port has 10.5 metres in the channel (assuming a 4m tide). This allows the port to accommodate ships with a draft of 9 metres. The port would routinely handle very substantial vessels. In the container handling (Lo-Lo/Unitised) operations the current port depths work well for the type of short sea and feeder vessels that are regarded as appropriate for the current market.

There is some demand for a move to 9.5 metre drafts for a portion of the ports bulk busi-



ness. This is something the port is currently examining using its recently developed estuary model. This model will allow the port to evaluate the potential to gain greater depth, gauge the capital outlay and wider estuary impact and, most importantly, understand the ongoing cost of maintaining a new depth.

### **Local Improvement Scheme Funding**

229. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the allocation for the local improvement scheme in each of the years 2008 to 2016, and to date in 2017. [53349/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Due to the major cut-backs in roads funding resulting from the financial crisis it was necessary for my Department to cease making separate allocations to local authorities in respect of the Local Improvement Scheme (LIS) in 2012. No provision was made for LIS in 2012. Since 2013 local authorities have had the option of using a proportion of their Discretionary Grant for LIS should they wish to do so. The decision on whether to allocate funding for LIS and the management of the allocation process has been a matter for each local authority.

Details of LIS allocations before 2012 are included in the Regional and Local Road Grant Payment booklets which are available in the Dáil Library.

Minister Ring's Department is now taking the lead regarding the LIS having launched a scheme in September 2017 and I understand further funding will be allocated by that Department in 2018.

### **Rail Services Provision**

230. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will request Iarnród Éireann to increase the number of carriages from four to seven on the 9.35 a.m. train from Drogheda to Pearse Station. [53352/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The issues raised are matters for the National Transport Authority (NTA), in conjunction with Iarnród Éireann, and I have forwarded the Deputy's questions to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Departmental Funding**

231. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details of funding allocated to the OPW and Heritage Ireland in each of the years 2010 to 2016, and to date in 2017 to maintain, protect and develop the more than 700 sites and monuments for which they are responsible. [53367/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** Responsibility for the allocation of funding to the OPW and the Heritage Council rests with my colleagues, the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform and the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht respectively. Questions relating to the allocation of funding to the OPW and the Heritage Council are more appropriate to the responsible Ministers.



The Deputy might be interested to know that Fáilte Ireland, which operates under the aegis of my Department, has a strategic partnership in place with the OPW to assist in the refurbishment and enhancement of key visitor attractions.

I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply to the Deputy with further information in relation to its strategic partnership arrangement with the OPW. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

### **Sports Capital Programme Applications**

232. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will review a sports capital grant application (details supplied); and if an appeals process will be in place for unsuccessful applications. [53423/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** I can confirm that the organisation referred to by the Deputy applied for a grant under the 2017 Sports Capital Programme.

When the 2017 Programme was advertised, my Department issued a guide to filling out the application form which set out the Department's minimum requirements that applicants had to meet to be considered for funding.

Applications were deemed invalid primarily for one or more of the following reasons:

- Title/Access requirements of the Sports Capital Programme not satisfied
- Evidence of own funding not provided in prescribed format
- Insufficient own funding

All applicants have now been contacted with details of the outcome of the assessment of their application, including details of why applications were deemed invalid. Relevant organisations have also been informed that they may appeal these decisions if they believe that an error has been made in deeming their application invalid. The deadline for receipt of such appeals is 20 December.

### **Road Projects**

233. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding for a project (details supplied) will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53479/17]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter for TII.

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

## Community Childcare Subvention Programme

234. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to extend the community childcare subvention programme to children that are in receipt of a medical card in cases in which their parent is not in a receipt of a medical card; if not, the reasons therefor; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53320/17]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The eligibility of the applying parent is determined by their status with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) and certain other factors including medical cards or GP visit cards (for children over 6 only). The amount of the subvention received from my Department is determined by the parent's DEASP status. It is current practice that when a DEASP payment and a medical card (parent's or child's) is received the system should automatically award the highest band due to a parent.

## Library Services Funding

235. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if additional funding will be provided for the provision of a library (details supplied) in County Longford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53368/17]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** A €22m Libraries Capital Investment Programme is in place for the period 2016-2021 to support the development of priority projects submitted by local authorities. In this regard, the programme includes a priority proposal submitted by Longford County Council in respect of Edgeworthstown library.

My Department is providing a contribution of €1.25m under the capital programme towards the overall cost of the Edgeworthstown development, which is estimated at €2.9m. The matching funding will be provided by Longford County Council, which has responsibility generally for the provision of premises and facilities in the public library service in its capacity as a library authority. There is currently no additional funding available from my Department to further support this project.

## JobPath Data

236. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will provide the original request for tenders for the JobPath scheme; the number of persons that were part of the process; if the tender was published on etenders; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53273/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** A public procurement process for the provision of the JobPath service was conducted in accordance with EU and Irish procurement rules. On 12 December 2013, my Department published a Prior Information Notice (PIN) and a request for tenders (RFT) notice on both the Government etenders website ([www.etenders.gov.ie](http://www.etenders.gov.ie)) and on the website of the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU).

That information was also published and continues to be available on the Department's own website ([www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie) <http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/JobPath-RFT.aspx>). In addition, the Clarifications document (comprising queries and responses to issues raised by potential tender-

ers) was published and continues to be available on the Department's website (<http://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/Clarification-Q-A.pdf>).

The procurement process was overseen by a Board that was chaired at Assistant Secretary level and included an independent external member who was formerly a commissioner of a regulatory body. The Board was advised by the Attorney General's Office and the Chief State Solicitor's Office as well as the National Development Finance Agency. The outcome of the process and the recommendation to award contracts were reviewed with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the final decision to proceed to contract was made by Government.

All tenders were submitted on a confidential basis. My Department disclosed the names of the successful bidders in its contract award notice which was issued on 9 July 2015. Contracts were awarded on the basis of the most economically advantageous tender based on the following criteria (i) cost, (ii) implementation of services, (iii) delivery of services and (iv) contract management and governance.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Community Employment Schemes Supervisors**

**237. Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if it is the sponsor or supervisor that has responsibility for the implementation for the daily running of community employment schemes, including the new welfare partners website; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53277/17]

**238. Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the additional training provided to sponsors, community employment supervisors and assistant supervisors in respect of the new welfare partners website; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53278/17]

**239. Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the additional training provided to sponsors, community employment supervisors and assistant supervisors in respect of additional responsibilities such as being responsible for and ascertaining the way in which coaching and mentoring takes place and providing evidence to their community development officer of this being done; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53279/17]

**241. Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to issues in relation to the helpline for community employment supervisors and assistant supervisors; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53281/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 237 to 239, inclusive, and 241 together.

Community Employment (CE) schemes are typically sponsored by groups (known as CE sponsors) wishing to benefit the local community. The CE sponsoring organisations are the legal employers of CE supervisors and assistant supervisors.

My Department is committed to modernising its service delivery and developing systems to support its functions. Responsibility for CE transferred from FÁS to my Department in January 2012 and continued to be delivered on a legacy IT platform. Recently, the CE Programme

has been integrated onto my Department's IT infrastructure. As part of this implementation, a new digital service - Welfare Partners - was developed for organisations who engage with the Department, with a specific focus on providing an online service to CE sponsors and other business partners.

My Department undertook nationwide consultation workshops with key CE scheme sponsors and supervisors during May and early June. As part of these consultations, sponsors were informed that my Department would be implementing a new IT platform/Welfare partners, on a phased basis. All sponsors and supervisors were invited to attend specific information sessions, held nationwide, on how to use the Welfare Partners platform. A dedicated helpdesk was established to provide assistance to sponsor groups with getting started on Welfare Partners. Additional resources have recently been allocated to this helpdesk to assist sponsors and supervisors with any access issues they may have. In addition, sponsors and supervisors have been provided with a Welfare Partners User Manual and further guidance, including a FAQ section, is available on [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie). Each scheme also has a dedicated local DEASP Officer who is available to help with any further queries.

The sponsor is responsible, through the supervisor, to ensure that the developmental needs of each CE participant on the scheme are catered for. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to ensure that a profile of each participant's needs is drawn up through one-to-one consultations, and that this profile is reflected in the Individual Learner Plan (ILP), which must be approved by the Department. Each scheme must designate a member of the Project Management Committee to fulfil the role of the participant development officer. This officer must give full support to the supervisor in the identification, preparation, procurement and delivery of all relevant training, as outlined in the ILP. It is the individual sponsor's responsibility to meet their contractual obligations and to manage and direct their staff.

Briefings are provided to sponsors, by Departmental staff, as and when required, to assist them in the management and delivery of the CE scheme, specifically in relation to participant development and scheme governance.

The IT enhancements outlined above will have a positive impact for CE sponsors as it will ease the administrative burden and improve operational processing. Customer service is at the centre of my Department's strategies and business and we will continue to develop and extend the range of online services in line with the service delivery modernisation programme.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Question No. 238 answered with Question No. 237.*

*Question No. 239 answered with Question No. 237.*

### **Community Employment Schemes Review**

240. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reviews undertaken regarding the community employment scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53280/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Following the publication, earlier this year, of my Department's Report - An Analysis of the Community Employment Programme - the Government approved a number of changes to the terms and conditions of participation on CE.

The main purpose of the changes is to broaden access to CE to a wider range of people. The changes saw the general qualifying age for CE, for those on the live register, reduced from 25 to 21 years. It is now also easier for previous participants, who have exhausted their CE entitlement, to requalify as participation prior to the year 2007 has been disregarded. While participants aged between 21 and 55 years are entitled to one year on the programme, this can be extended by up to 2 more years if they are engaged in a recognised training or education award that is helping them progress towards employment. All CE participants aged 55 and over will be able to avail of 3 consecutive years on a CE. There will be an overall limit of 6 years from 2007 (or 7 years if on a disability payment).

The Government is very conscious of the value of these schemes, both in terms of work experience and training they provide to assist long-term unemployed people to return to employment, and also the benefit of these schemes to communities across Ireland supporting community services in childcare, health and social care, and local facilities.

I have asked my officials to forward a copy of the CE Report to the Deputy for her consideration.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

*Question No. 241 answered with Question No. 237.*

### **Community Employment Schemes Supervisors**

242. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to restore annual leave for community employment supervisors and assistant supervisors to 21 days; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53282/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Community Employment (CE) Sponsoring Organisations are the legal employers of CE Supervisors. The Department funds the statutory holiday entitlement for CE Supervisors which, depending on the hours worked, is usually 20 days plus public holidays. There has been no change to the number of annual leave days funded for CE Supervisors since the Department took on responsibility for the CE programme in 2012.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Community Employment Schemes Supervisors**

243. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address ongoing issues in respect of pension schemes for community employment supervisors and assistant supervisors (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53283/17]

**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 and the Department was neither party to or bound by the Labour Court Recommendation (LCR19293). 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.

The Forum last met on 23 November 2017 and I understand that a paper outlining the costs involved was presented. The unions have agreed to review and revert as soon as possible. Following on from this, a meeting is to be arranged between the trade unions and my colleague, Pascal Donoghue T.D., Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Community Employment Schemes Supervisors**

244. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding contracts of indefinite duration for community employment supervisors and assistant supervisors; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53284/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My Department provides funding to Community Employment (CE) Sponsoring Organisations on the basis of an annual contract agreement. The CE Sponsors are the legal employers of CE supervisors and the duration for which the Sponsor contracts with the supervisor is a matter between the two parties. However, the Department provides funding for the duration of the agreement (1 year). It is recommended that such contracts reflect that the position is subject to continued funding by the Department for the scheme.

Supervisors are excluded from Section 9 provisions of the Protection of Employees (fixed Term Work) Act 2003 as they are "employees with a contract of employment which has been concluded within a framework of a specific public or publicly-supported training" under Section 2 of this Act. This means that CE contracts for supervisors cannot be of indefinite duration.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Fuel Allowance Applications**

245. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application for a fuel allowance by a person (details supplied) has been received; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53316/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Free fuel allowance is a payment under the National Fuel Scheme to help with the cost of heating your home during the winter months. It is paid to people who are dependent on long-term social welfare payments and who are unable to provide for their own heating needs.

This gentleman has been awarded Free Fuel allowance since 8 October 2014. An application for the change of payment frequency of Fuel Allowance was received by my department on 25 October 2017.

I can confirm that the person in question will receive his first Lump Sum Free Fuel payment on 3 January 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.



## **Household Benefits Scheme**

246. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will reconsider the household benefit package criteria for persons under 66 years of age that are living with another adult with the view to including those in receipt of jobseeker's allowance as a qualified adult; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53350/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The household benefits package (HHB) comprises the electricity or gas allowance, and the free television licence. My Department will spend approximately €232 million this year on the household benefits package for over 434,000 customers.

The package is generally available to people living in the State, aged 66 years or over who are in receipt of a social welfare type payment or who satisfy a means test. The package is also available to carers and people with disabilities under the age of 66 who are in receipt of certain welfare type payments. Widows and widowers aged from 60 to 65 whose late spouses had been in receipt of the household benefits package retain that entitlement. Therefore anyone aged under 70 years of age must be in receipt of a qualifying payment from the Department or satisfy a means test in order to qualify for HHB.

They must also satisfy the household composition test meaning they must live alone, or only with certain excepted people, who are:

- A qualified adult (a spouse, civil partner or cohabitant is considered a qualified adult if a person is receiving an allowance for him/her with their payment, or would be receiving a payment for them but for the fact that they are in receipt of a payment in their own right)

- Dependent children under the age of 18, or under the age of 22 if in full-time education (a certificate from the school/college must be supplied for those aged 18 or over)

- A person who is so incapacitated as to require constant care and attention for at least 12 months (medical certification may be required)

- A person(s) who would qualify for the allowance in his/her own right (for example, a person getting a State pension)

- A person who is providing the claimant or someone in their household with constant care and attention, if they are so incapacitated as to require constant care and attention for at least 12 months (medical certification may be required).

Any decision to expand entitlement for receipt of HHB to include those living with another adult in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance would increase the cost of the scheme and would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

## **State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility**

247. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the adult dependent rate will be applied to the State pension (contributory) in the name of a person (details supplied). [53361/17]

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

person concerned was awarded maximum personal rate of state pension (contributory) from 18 February 2017, their 66th birthday. An increase for qualified adult was not awarded at that time as the person's spouse was in receipt of a social welfare payment at a higher rate in their own right. Written notification of these decisions issued to the claimant on 17 January 2017.

The person concerned re-applied for an increase for qualified adult in respect of their spouse on 11 October 2017, as their spouse who had returned to work had ceased employment. An increase was awarded with effect from 7 October 2017, the day following cessation of their spouse's employment. The rate of increase awarded is the maximum rate for a qualified adult under age 66, with nil means assessed against them. Written notification of this decision was issued on 8 December 2017. Arrears of increase of qualified adult payment due have been paid.

It is noted that the spouse of the person concerned was in receipt of a social welfare payment in their own right at a higher rate until 2 September 2017, after which they resumed employment until 6 October 2017. If the claimant wishes to submit details of their spouse's earnings from 3 September to 6 October 2017, entitlement to an increase for that period can be examined.

Due to a change in circumstances, the person concerned may now be eligible for fuel allowance, which is a means tested payment. An application form has issued to the person concerned for completion.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Departmental Staff Redeployment**

248. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if additional staff will be made available to help clear the backlog of applications for carer's allowance, disability allowance and domiciliary care allowance. [53396/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are made as quickly as possible. The staffing needs for all areas within the Department are continuously reviewed, taking account of workloads, management priorities and the competing demands arising, to ensure that the best use is made of all available resources with a view to providing an efficient service to those who rely on the schemes operated by the Department.

Like all Government departments and agencies, my Department is required to operate within a staff ceiling figure and a commensurate administrative staffing budget, which for this Department has involved reductions in staff numbers. Within these constraints, the Department is focusing on prioritising the filling of critical posts.

Remedial action has been taken to respond to the ongoing significant increase in the number of claims for domiciliary care allowance, carers allowance and disability allowance, in order to reduce the average processing time. Providing sufficient resources for these scheme areas remains a priority.

### **Back to Education Allowance Eligibility**

249. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the post graduate level 9 in accountancy will be included in the back to education allowance scheme (details supplied). [53397/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Back to Education Allowance Scheme (BTEA) is designed to support second chance education. It enables eligible persons to pursue approved education courses and to continue to receive income support for the duration of a course of study, subject to meeting certain conditions.

Access to BTEA at postgraduate level is limited. BTEA is only payable to persons who wish to pursue a postgraduate course of study that leads to a higher diploma (H-Dip) qualification in any discipline or to persons in pursuit of a Professional Masters in Education. An exception to the eligibility rule for masters is made whereby a person is admitted to a master's programme based solely on life experience and provided the applicant is not the holder of any third level qualification.

The ACCA post graduate level 9 in accountancy is not eligible for BTEA.

Administration of BTEA is aligned with the student support schemes under the Department of Education and Skills. BTEA should not be viewed as an alternative to the student grant system.

I have no plans to alter the current range of courses covered by the scheme.

### **State Pension (Contributory)**

250. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the proposed action she plans to take in the next 12 months to address the pension anomaly impacting, in particular, on women arising from changes made in 2012; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53407/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The changes made to State Pension (contributory) rate bands in Budget 2012, affected those pensioners who had a yearly average of 39 or less weekly social insurance contributions over the course of their working life.

The current rate bands were introduced from September 2012, replacing previous rates introduced in 2000. The rate bands in place between 2000 and 2012 were more generous than those in place before and after that period, and were a feature of the economic and political environment at that time.

The economic crash changed the focus and while other payments were reduced as a result, the core rates of the pension were maintained. Instead of reducing those payments, which many vulnerable pensioners were solely reliant upon, the rates paid to new pensioners who both have additional means and lesser PRSI contribution records were reduced.

It should be noted that, for a person with a yearly average of 20 contributions, the new rate of payment introduced in 2012 was still higher than the maximum rate that was in place at the start of 2006. Also, it should be noted that in all European countries and beyond, pension reforms have been introduced to make them more sustainable, and these will generally result in people having different payments depending upon when they reach pension age. The only way to avoid this would be to introduce the reforms for existing pensioners, and decrease the incomes pensioners have become dependent upon.

The 2012 rate bands more closely reflect the social insurance contributions history of a person than those in place between 2000 and 2012. The current rate bands still provide pensions to people which are better than proportionate with their level of contribution. A person with only

20 years of contributions over nearly 50 years will still get an 85% pension, which compares favourably with contributory pensions in other EU countries.

It is estimated that to revert to the previous bands from January 2018 would result in an annual cost of well over €70 million in 2018, and this annual cost would increase by an estimated €10 to €12 million extra each following year.

The Department is examining in depth various options that would provide some relief to those who would have a higher contributory pension, had the ratebands not been amended in 2012. As soon as the report is finished I intend to bring it to a cabinet committee and subsequently to Government for consideration early in the New Year.

The National Pensions Framework proposed that a total contribution approach should replace the yearly average approach to the calculation of the State Pension (contributory). A discussion paper is being drafted by my Department and it is hoped to start the consultation process with relevant stakeholders including interest groups, representative bodies and the Oireachtas shortly. Following the consultation period, a proposal to Government will be submitted seeking approval of the new approach.

The main aim of Government policy on pensions is to make sure that pensions are affordable, sustainable and keep their value in the coming years. The reforms that are planned will result in a more inclusive and fairer pension system for all citizens.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Income Data

251. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the rate of severe material deprivation for lone parent households here as measured by EUROSTAT in tabular form; the way in which this rate compares to the EU average; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53408/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The latest EUROSTAT European Statistics on Income and Living Conditions data show that the severe material deprivation rate for lone parent households in Ireland was 22.6% in 2015. This is the second successive year the rate has reduced – representing a 9.7 percentage point reduction on the 2013 rate of 32.3%. The Irish rate compares to the EU average of 17.1% in 2015 - see Table 1 attached.

It is important to note that the full impact of the economic recovery to date is not reflected in these figures, which relate to 2015. Macro-economic and labour market indicators have shown continued economic and employment growth since then. Unemployment has fallen from 9.4% in mid-2015 to 6.1% now. The number of people in receipt of working-age income and employment supports has also continued to fall.

With these improvements, the Government was in a position to introduce a range of welfare increases from 2016 onwards. This includes a package of measures to support lone parents, encouraging them into the workplace and into education and helping to reduce their childcare costs. In Budget 2017 all lone parents on the one-parent family payment, the jobseeker's transitional payment and jobseeker's allowance have benefited from the €5 increase in the weekly rates of payment from March. Budget 2018 introduced a further €5 per week increase along with an increase of €2 per week per child for qualified child dependents. A new €500 annual Cost of Education Allowance was made available to Back to Education Allowance participants

with children from the academic year starting in September 2017. In addition, the income disregards for the one-parent family payment and the jobseeker's transitional payment increased by €20 from January, from €90 to €110 per week, reversing in part previous reductions, to encourage one parent families to stay in, and return to, work. This was increased to €130 per week in Budget 2018 (an additional €20 per week).

The improvement in the economy, together with the welfare measures referred to, are likely to have supported a further reduction in severe material deprivation in the period since 2015. This improvement is expected to continue with further rises in incomes and living standards.

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

**Table 1: Severe Material Deprivation rate in lone parent households 2010 to 2015**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Ireland	12.8%	23.3%	27.4%	32.3%	25.1%	22.6%
EU-28	17.1%	18.4%	21.5%	20.7%	19.2%	17.1%

Source: EUROSTAT EU-SILC, various years. Extracted 11/12/2017.

## Child Poverty

252. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the rate of severe material deprivation for children here as measured by EUROSTAT in tabular form; the way in which this compares to the EU average; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53409/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The most recent EUROSTAT data shows that some 8.9% of children in Ireland were severely materially deprived in 2015, as compared to a EU28 average rate of 9.6% (see Table 1). This is an improvement on 2014 where the rates were 10.1% and 10.4% respectively. Given the continuing economic recovery throughout 2017 and measures introduced in Budgets 2016, 2017 and 2018, I expect the severe material deprivation figures for those years, when they become available, to show further improvement. I will continue to work with my Government colleagues to ensure that the economic recovery is experienced in all regions and by all families, households and individuals.

Budget 2018 introduced a €5 per week increase in the maximum weekly rate for working-age people along with an increase of €2 per week per child for qualified child dependents. Budget 2018 also included an increase of €10 per week in the income thresholds for Family Income Supplement for families with up to three children and an increase of €20 per week in the income disregards for the one-parent family payment and the jobseeker's transitional payment (bringing it to €130 per week). These increases will assist those families who are most in need.

The Government's strategy for addressing poverty and social exclusion is set out in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. The Plan identifies a wide range of targeted actions and interventions to achieve the overall objective of reducing consistent poverty which includes

deprivation. The Department is reviewing the Plan, as it reaches the end of its current term this year, with a view to developing an updated plan for future periods. The Department is also reviewing the national social target for poverty reduction. This review will be undertaken in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

**Table 1: Severe Material Deprivation rate for Children 2010 to 2015**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Ireland	8.2%	10.0%	12.4%	13.4%	10.1%	8.9%
EU-28	9.8%	10.0%	11.8%	11.1%	10.4%	9.6%

Source: EUROSTAT EU-SILC, various years. Extracted 11/12/2017.

<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

### Social Welfare Benefits Waiting Times

253. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the average processing time for all social welfare payments, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53410/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The information (where available) requested by the Deputy is detailed in the following table:

Average time to Award by scheme at 31 October 2017

Schemes	Average time to award (weeks)
Jobseeker's Benefit	1
Jobseeker's Allowance	2
One-Parent Family Payment	5
State Pension Contributory (Dom)	5
Widow, Widower's and Surviving Civil Partners Contributory Pension	1
Widowed Parent Grant	1
State Pension Non-Contributory	16
Household Benefits	1
Free Travel	4
Domiciliary Care Allowance	17
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	1
Child Benefit (Domestic & FRA)	3
Child Benefit (EU Regulation)	32
Child Benefit (Over 16)	1
Child Benefit (Additional Child)	1
Treatment Benefit	6
Maternity Benefit	6
Paternity Benefit	6
Family Income Supplement (New)	4
Carer's Allowance	16
Carer's Benefit	11



Schemes	Average time to award (weeks)
Disability Allowance	10
Invalidity Pension	5
Illness Benefit	1
Occupational Injury Benefit	1

### Social Welfare Appeals Waiting Times

254. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the average waiting time for a decision on appeal for social protection payments paid on a weekly basis in cases in which there is no oral hearing and in cases in which there is an oral hearing in 2017, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53411/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The table provides the details which have been requested by the Deputy to the end of November 2017.

Significant efforts and resources have been devoted to reforming the appeal process in recent years. As a result, appeal processing times improved between 2011 and 2016 from 52.5 weeks for an oral hearing in 2011 to 24.1 weeks in 2016 and from 25.1 weeks for a summary decision in 2011 to 17.6 weeks in 2016.

I understand from the Chief Appeals Officer that there has been a slight increase in processing times in 2017 with oral hearings taking, on average, 26.2 weeks and summary decisions taking 19.7 weeks to finalise. A number of factors have contributed to the increase including the retirement of six experienced Appeals Officers during the first half of 2017. However, she is hopeful that processing times will improve as a number of newly appointed Officers gain experience in their roles.

The Chief Appeals Officer has advised that specific actions taken to reduce processing times include: liaising with HR to ensure that vacancies are filled quickly; ensuring that training is given to new Appeals Officers as early as possible; working with the Department to reduce time in submitting appeal files; and a restructuring of the mechanism for recording appeal decisions.

It is open to an appellant to claim supplementary welfare allowance pending the outcome of their appeal if their means are insufficient to meet their needs.

The Chief Appeals Officer assures me that processing times are a priority. However, the drive for efficiency must be balanced with the competing demand to ensure that decisions are consistent and of high quality.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Appeal Processing Times by Scheme 01 January 2017- 30 November 2017

	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Adoptive Benefit	13.4	-
Blind Person's Pension	20.2	24.4
Carers Allowance	21.5	23.9
Carers Benefit	16.9	21.3
Child Benefit	22.7	32.2
Disability Allowance	17.4	24.0

	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Illness Benefit	28.1	30.3
Partial Capacity Benefit	34.8	34.3
Domiciliary Care Allowance	26.5	33.6
Deserted Wives Benefit	13.1	27.7
Farm Assist	20.7	25.7
Bereavement Grant	15.1	-
Family Income Supplement	21.7	32.8
Invalidity Pension	16.6	23.6
Liable Relatives	20.6	24.1
Maternity Benefit	18.8	20.1
Paternity Benefit	19.4	-
One Parent Family Payment	24.0	34.9
State Pension (Contributory)	31.9	46.4
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	25.9	35.5
State Pension (Transition)	81.1	-
Occupational Injury Benefit	19.8	26.4
Disablement Pension	24.6	28.8
OIB-Medical Care	-	27.3
Incapacity Supplement	54.2	37.2
Guardian's Payment (Con)	24.4	26.1
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	16.0	23.4
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	19.4	26.8
Jobseeker's Allowance	17.7	25.0
BTW Family Dividend	19.7	27.5
Jobseeker's Transitional	23.2	23.2
Recoverable Benefits & Assistance	27.4	-
Jobseeker's Benefit	20.3	24.0
Carer's Support Grant *	17.8	25.7
Treatment Benefit	14.0	-
Insurability of Employment	43.3	91.3
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	16.6	25.2
Survivor's Pension (Con)	22.0	34.1
Survivor's Pension (Non-con)	20.6	24.1
Widowed Parent Grant	19.5	-
All Appeals	19.7	26.2

\* Previously called Respite Care Grant

### Consultancy Contracts Expenditure

255. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the expenditure on external consultant reports commissioned by her Department since 6 May 2016 to date; the report and expenditure on each report in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53412/17]

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

information requested is currently being compiled by my Department and will be provided to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Question Heading for question(s) 256**

256. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the cost of the welfare cheats cheat us all campaign since its commencement to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53413/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The full cost of the Department's 2017 fraud and control awareness campaign came to €163,922 excluding VAT. This includes all design and advertising costs associated with the campaign (print advertising, national and regional radio advertising, outdoor and online/digital advertising). No additional costs arose in staff resources, website development or in the provision of the telephone reporting facility.

As the Deputy will be aware, the purpose of the campaign was threefold – to inform claimants as to the necessity to keep the Department updated regarding their circumstances, to deter potential fraudsters and to assure the general public that the Department takes fraud seriously.

The Department's preliminary results for 2017 (compiled mid-November 2017) indicate that some 8,200 reviews have been undertaken or are in the course of being undertaken arising from information reported by members of the public. These results include all of the reports received during the campaign. Preliminary indications are that the value of claims stopped or reduced in value will produce control savings of €4.7m.

Finally, the Deputy should note that by the end of October, just over 18,250 reports had been received, an increase of 15% on the same period last year.

### **Poverty Data**

257. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the rate of severe material deprivation here; the way in which this rate compares to the EU average; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53414/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The most recent EUROSTAT data shows that 7.5% of the population in Ireland was severely materially deprived in 2015, compared to the EU28 average rate of 8.1% (see Table 1). This is an improvement on 2014 where the rates were 8.4% and 8.9% respectively.

However, the full impact of the recovery is not reflected in these figures, which relate to 2015. Macro-economic and labour market indicators have shown continued economic and employment growth since then. Unemployment has fallen from 9.4% in mid-2015 to 6.1% now. The number of people in receipt of working-age income and employment supports has also continued to fall. Notwithstanding this, Budget 2018 introduced increases in a range of supports including €5 per week increases in the maximum weekly rate for working-age people and young jobseekers and for pensioners, with proportionate increases for adult dependents and an increase of €2 per child per week for qualified child dependents. These increases will assist those individuals and families who are most in need.

Given the continuing economic recovery throughout 2017 and the measures introduced in Budgets 2016, 2017 and 2018, I expect the severe material deprivation figures for those years,

when they become available, to show further improvement. I will continue to work with my Government colleagues to ensure that the economic recovery is experienced in all regions and by all families, households and individuals.

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

**Table 1: Severe Material Deprivation Rate 2010 to 2015**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Ireland	5.7%	7.8%	9.8%	9.9%	8.4%	7.5%
EU-28	8.4%	8.8%	9.9%	9.6%	8.9%	8.1%

Source: EUROSTAT EU-SILC, various years. Extracted 11/12/2017.

<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

### Poverty Data

258. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the rates of poverty and deprivation for those not at work due to an illness or a disability in tabular form; the way in which these figures compared to the EU average; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53415/17]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The latest CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) results for 2015 show that the consistent poverty rate, for people in households headed by a person whose principal economic status was "unable to work due to illness or a disability", was 22.4% in 2015. The at-risk-of-poverty rate was 34.8% with the basic deprivation rate at 53.2%.

Neither Eurostat nor the OECD reports on consistent poverty, at-risk-of-poverty or basic deprivation measures based on principal economic status. However, in the European Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), disability is based on the concept of global activity limitation. This is defined as a "limitation in activities people usually do because of health problems for at least the past six months" but it does not differentiate between those in employment and those not in employment. The latest EU-SILC data available shows that the severe material deprivation rate for people (aged 16 years and over) who are limited in their normal activities due to a health problem was 14.9% in Ireland in 2015, as compared to the EU average of 11.3%.

With regard to the national figures, given the continuing economic recovery throughout 2017 and the measures introduced in Budgets 2016, 2017 and 2018, it is reasonable to expect future figures to show improvements. I will continue to work with my Government colleagues to ensure that the economic recovery is experienced in all regions and by all families, households and individuals.

The Government is committed to increasing the employment opportunities for people with a disability. The Comprehensive Employment Strategy for people with disabilities adopts a

cross-government approach that brings together various measures, to be taken by different Departments and State agencies, in a concerted effort to address the barriers and challenges that impact on the employment of people with disabilities. The six strategic priorities are to: build skills, capacity and independence; provide bridges and supports into work; make work pay; promote job retention and re-entry into work; provide co-ordinated and seamless support; and engage employers. These priorities are incorporated into the Pathways to Work Strategy and this ensures that there is an integrated focus on supports that enable people with disabilities to participate in employment where they have the capacity to do so.

My Department provides a range of specific income, activation and employment supports for people with a disability. For instance, the partial capacity benefit scheme enables recipients of invalidity pension and illness benefit to take-up employment, on a voluntary basis, while continuing to receive income support. The Department manages a supported employment service (EmployAbility) which provides a dedicated job-coaching service for people with disabilities. Intreo services are also available to provide employment support services for people with disabilities who wish to engage with the service on a voluntary basis. There is also a focus on supports available to employers who employ people with disabilities such as the Wage Subsidy Scheme and the Workplace Equipment Adaption Grant Scheme.

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

#### Severe Material Deprivation Rate for People aged 16 & over

Country	Percentage
Ireland	14.9%
EU	11.3%

#### Question Heading for question(s) 259,260,261

259. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the rules in place regulating the development of solar farms; his views on the lack of regulations for solar farms; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that local authorities have raised concerns that there are no national guidelines for the development of solar farms (details supplied); his views on these concerns; his further views on whether the lack of regulation is deterring investment in the sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53469/17]

260. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the planning applications received, refused and granted for solar farms for each local authority in each of the years 2015, 2016 and to date in 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53470/17]

261. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to bring forward guidelines for solar power development for use by local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53481/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 259 to 261, inclusive, together.

While there are no specific planning guidelines in place in respect of solar farms, proposals for individual solar farm developments are subject to the statutory requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, in the same manner as other proposed developments. Planning applications are made to the relevant local planning authority, with a right of appeal to An Bord Pleanála.

Under the Planning and Development Act, each planning authority's development plan must set out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the area concerned. Section 10 of the Act requires a development plan to include, inter alia, objectives for the provision or facilitation of the provision of infrastructure, including energy facilities, and many local authorities have developed renewable energy strategies for their areas in this context.

In making decisions on planning applications, planning authorities and the Board must consider the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, having regard to the provisions of the local development plan, any submissions or observations received and relevant Ministerial or Government policies, including any relevant guidelines issued by my Department. Planning authorities must then make their own decisions, based on the specific merits or otherwise of individual planning applications.

I am satisfied that the planning code is sufficiently robust to facilitate the assessment of individual planning permission applications for solar farm developments. However, the matter is being kept under review, in consultation with my colleague, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, and his Department who lead on renewable energy policy - in the context of the Government's White Paper on Energy Policy, published in December 2015, the development of a Renewable Electricity Policy and Development Framework, as well as the finalisation of a new support scheme for renewable electricity by that Department, expected in 2018.

In relation to planning statistics, these are compiled by each planning authority on an annual basis for collation and publication on my Department's website, at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/planning/statistics/planning-statistics-1> .

The statistics collected relate to the total numbers of:

- Invalid applications received,
- Applications received for outline permission and full permission,
- Decisions to grant/refuse permission,
- Decisions issued within the statutory eight-week period,
- Decisions deferred, and
- Percentages for grants/refusals, decisions made within eight weeks and decisions deferred.

The statistics collected relate to the total number of applications and decisions for all developments that require planning permission, broken down by year and planning authority but are not broken down by development type.

The specific information requested in relation to the number of planning applications received, refused and granted for a particular development type is not collated or available within my Department's statistics.



**Commercial Rates**

262. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the local authorities that have taken advantage of part 5 of the Local Government (Financial and Audit Procedures) Regulations 2014, which provides discretion to the elected members of a council to vary the level of rate refunds on vacant properties; the steps his Department is taking to encourage local authorities to take advantage of the regulations to alter the rate of refund on vacant properties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53292/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Local authorities are under a statutory obligation to levy rates on the occupiers of rateable property in accordance with the details entered in the valuation lists prepared by the independent Commissioner of Valuation under the Valuation Acts 2001 to 2015.

Legislative provision is made for the refund of rates paid on vacant commercial properties in certain circumstances. The Local Government Act 1946 provides that where a property is unoccupied on the date of the making of the rate, the owner becomes liable for rates. However, the owner is entitled to a refund if the property is vacant for specified purposes, these being if the premises are unoccupied for the purpose of additions, alterations or repairs; where the owner is bona fide unable to obtain a suitable tenant at a reasonable rent; and where the premises are vacant pending redevelopment. The collection of rates and the determination of eligibility for a refund in this context are matters for each individual local authority.

The Local Government Act 1946 provided that the owner was entitled to a 100% refund in most local authority areas. Separate legislation governed refunds in the cities of Dublin, Limerick and Cork, where the same criteria for refunds applied but only 50% of the rates paid were refundable.

With effect from 1 June 2014, when the relevant provision commenced, the Local Government Reform Act 2014 gives discretion to the elected members of individual local authorities to vary the level of rates refunds that apply in individual local electoral areas within the authority's administrative area. The Local Government (Financial and Audit Procedures) Regulations 2014 provide that the decision to alter the rate of refund should be taken at the annual budget meeting and that the rate of refund decided in respect of the relevant local electoral area shall apply to eligible persons for the year to which the budget relates. The absence of a decision to vary the refund means that the existing legislative provisions regarding the rate of refunds apply (either 100% or 50% as set out above). Guidance has been provided to local authorities and elected members in that regard.

My Department has collated information regarding the decisions by local authorities in relation to refund rates from 2015 to 2017. For 2015, four local authorities chose to amend their refund rate. Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council reduced its rate from 100% to 75%. Galway City and Louth County Councils reduced their rates from 100% to 50%. Limerick City and County adopted a refund rate of 25%. All other local authorities chose to retain the existing 2014 refund rate for 2015. This included Dublin City and Cork City which both retained the pre-existing 50% refund rates in their local authority areas.

For 2016, all local authorities continued with the same refund rate adopted in 2015, except Waterford City and County Council, which reduced its refund rate from 100% to 70%.

For 2017, five local authorities chose to amend the refund rate they had for 2016. Dublin City Council reduced from 50% to 45%, Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown County Council reduced from 75% to 50%, Fingal County Council reduced from 100% to 75%, Limerick City and

County Council reduced from 25% to 10% and Waterford City and County Council reduced from 70% to 55%.

### **Valuation Office**

263. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the claims by Sligo County Council that it submitted details of a wind farm (details supplied) to the Valuation Office for revision in 2004; if his attention has been further drawn to claims by the executive of Sligo County Council that it was unable to levy rates on the windfarm since it became operational seven years ago due to the fact that the council did not receive the valuation from the Valuation Office until January 2017; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Sligo County Council lost approximately €89,000 income in rates from the wind farm each year due to the delay in it being valued; his plans to intervene to ensure that properties are valued promptly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53293/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I refer to the reply to Question No. 549 of 12 December 2017 which sets out the position in this matter.

### **Housing Inspections**

264. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 256 of 6 December 2017, the recommendations made to Wicklow County Council regarding its inspection and enforcement function; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53351/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Arising from an examination by my Department of Wicklow County Council's procedures and records in respect of private rented inspections, as part of an overall programme of review of local authority procedures in this area, a number of recommendations were made to Wicklow County Council to improve their inspection regime, records management and procedures in undertaking inspections of private rented accommodation.

In summary, the following recommendations were made to Wicklow County Council:

- to develop a private rented inspection programme of activity / policy statement,
- to develop a procedures manual for inspections,
- to identify inspection requirements and balance planned inspections with response-based activity, such as a more proactive, risk-based process to identify properties likely to be non-compliant,
- to develop a communications strategy for all stakeholders to clearly set out the rights and responsibilities of both tenants and landlords and to better inform the public, through its website and information leaflets, about how to make a complaint, and
- to develop procedures to ensure follow-up inspections and enforcement.

### **Local Authority Housing Maintenance**

265. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if local authorities can include charges for maintenance such as boiler servicing within the overall calculation of differential rent; and if so, the legislation under which such additional charges are permitted. [53398/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The making and amending of rent schemes is the responsibility of housing authorities as an integral part of their housing management functions.

Section 58(3) of the Housing Act 1966 provides that subject to such Regulations as may be made by the Minister under the section, a housing authority may charge such rent or other payment as they may determine from time to time, in respect of a dwelling of which they are the owner.

### **EU Treaties**

266. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 250 of 6 December 2017, the position in respect of Article 31 of the revised European Social Charter which relates to the right to housing and which Ireland has not to date accepted; if the position can be re-examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53400/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Ireland ratified the Revised European Social Charter on 4 November 2000. At that time Ireland accepted 92 of the 98 paragraphs of the Revised Charter. Three of those paragraphs not accepted by Ireland make up Article 31, which relates to the right to housing.

The issue of the right to housing was debated in Dáil Eireann and Seanad Eireann recently. Arising from this, a motion to refer the Eighth Report of the Convention on the Constitution, which dealt with economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to housing, to the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach was passed by the Dáil on 28 September 2017 and by the Seanad on 11 October 2017.

The matter of ratifying Article 31 of the Revised European Social Charter will be considered further after the Joint Committee has considered the matter.

### **Pyrite Resolution Board Expenditure**

267. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 518 of 6 December 2017, the cost of services stated to be provided by a company (details supplied) to deal with defects not associated with pyrite; and the reason these costs are not borne by a scheme. [53459/17]

268. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 518 of 6 December 2017, the reason €975,000 has been accumulated from a company (details supplied) in services for 1,400 houses verified for acceptance into the pyrite remediation scheme with 900 of those completely remediated. [53460/17]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 267 and 268 together.

The Pyrite Resolution Act 2013 provides the statutory framework for the establishment of

the Pyrite Resolution Board and for the making of a pyrite remediation scheme to be implemented by the Board, with support from the Housing Agency. The pyrite remediation scheme is a scheme of “last resort” and is limited in its application and scope. The full conditions for eligibility under the scheme are set out in the scheme, which is available on the Board’s website, [www.pyriteboard.ie](http://www.pyriteboard.ie).

The scheme is applicable to dwellings, which are subject to significant damage attributable to pyritic heave, established in accordance with I.S. 398-1:2013 - Reactive pyrite in sub-floor hardcore material – Part 1: Testing and categorisation protocol. In this regard, it is a condition of eligibility under the scheme that an application to the Board must be accompanied by a Building Condition Assessment with a Damage Condition Rating of 2. Dwellings which do not have a Damage Condition Rating of 2 are not eligible to apply under the scheme. This ensures that, having regard to the available resources, the focus of the scheme is on dwellings which are most severely damaged by pyritic heave.

A Supplemental Agreement was entered into with HomeBond, dated 4 December 2015, for dealing with structural defects not related to pyritic heave. In this context, my Department understands from the Pyrite Resolution Board that €52,000 has been expended to date under this agreement.

In regard to the specific arrangements under the Homebond agreement referred to, in accordance with the provisions of the Act, the Board is independent in the performance of its functions, and as Minister, I have no role in the operational matters pertaining to the implementation of the scheme. However my Department understands that in accordance with the provisions of the Act, the Housing Agency implements the remediation process and undertakes the procurement of professional services, remediation contracts and agreements.

The Board may be contacted by phone at Lo call 1890 252842 or by email to [info@pyriteboard.ie](mailto:info@pyriteboard.ie) or alternatively at [oireachtasinfo@pyriteboard.ie](mailto:oireachtasinfo@pyriteboard.ie). The Housing Agency may be contacted at [publicreps@housingagency.ie](mailto:publicreps@housingagency.ie).

## Heritage Projects

269. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the expected cost, the number of years it would take to deliver and the amount allocated for the Ulster Canal Project. [53345/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** In July 2007, the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) agreed to a proposal to restore the section of the Ulster Canal from Upper Lough Erne to Clones. Planning approvals for the project have been secured from the relevant authorities in the two jurisdictions.

Government approval to restore a 2.5 km stretch of the Ulster Canal from Upper Lough Erne to the International Scout Centre at Castle Saunderson near Belturbet in Co. Cavan, was secured on 24 February 2015. This work is estimated at €2.5m, including VAT.

Waterways Ireland is currently working on the first phase of reopening navigation from the Erne to Castle Saunderson on the Ulster Canal. Works are on target with completion anticipated at end of May 2018, subject to weather conditions and water levels over the 2017 /2018 winter.

In 2017 to date almost €2.6m has been spent on the entire Ulster Canal project. A further expenditure of €270k is forecast to the end of 2017. Expenditure of €1.133m is forecast to complete navigation to Castle Saunderson in 2018. The business case for the project updated

for my Department in 2015 estimated provisional costs for restoration of navigation to Clones at €46m, including VAT.

The project is progressing incrementally, as resources allow, and options for moving to the next phases are being considered.

### Creative Ireland Programme

270. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the full cost for the Creative Ireland supplement that ran in a magazine (details supplied) for 12 weeks; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53301/17]

271. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of weeks the Creative Ireland double page spread in a newspaper (details supplied) ran and is planned to run; the weekly cost of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53302/17]

272. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the dates on which two Creative Ireland supplements were contained in a newspaper (details supplied); the full cost of the feature; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53303/17]

273. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the identity of the regional newspapers and radio stations in and on which Creative Ireland advertising features were run; the cost of each feature in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53304/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 270 to 273, inclusive, together.

The Creative Ireland Programme is a culture-based programme designed to promote individual, community and national well-being and has citizen engagement at the heart of it. The core proposition is that participation in cultural activity drives personal and collective creativity, with significant implications for individual and societal well-being and achievement. As with any new Programme, it takes time to develop and mobilise. The expenditure set out in Table 1 contributed to an overall effort to provide information to citizens and to engage with as broad an audience as possible. The Table sets out all costs associated with all publications referred to in the questions and the circulation dates as requested:

**Table 1**

	Circulation Date	Cost
Irish Independent – Cruinniú na Casca 16 page news print	Saturday, April 15th 2017	€27,060.00
Irish Independent – Culture and Creativity Plan Supplement-72 page magazine	Saturday, June 10th	€98,805.90
Irish Times – Supplement-28 page magazine	Saturday, July 15th	€37,523.25
Irish Independent – Summer Series Weekly 2 page Spreads	Saturday June 17th to September 02nd	€19,188.00

As the Deputy will be aware the Creative Ireland Programme is embedded throughout the



31 local authority areas in Ireland. The regional media campaign reinforced and promoted the extensive work being undertaken by the local authorities as part of the Creative Ireland Programme, using both print and radio broadcasting to make it as inclusive and accessible as possible.

The following tables detail both the regional print and regional radio broadcast media which were used as part of our citizen engagement measures:

**Table 2**

Regional Newspapers	Cost
Regional NewspapersAnglo Celt, Clare Champion, Connacht / City Tribune, Donegal Democrat, Donegal News & Derry People, Dundalk Argus, Fingal Independent, Kerryman, Kilkenny People, Leinster Express, Leinster Leader, Leitrim Observer, Limerick Chronicle, Limerick Leader, Longford Leader, Meath Chronicle, Midland & Tullamore Tribune, Munster Express, Nationalist & Munster Advertiser (Clonmel), Nationalist Series, Northern Standard, Roscommon Herald, Sligo Champion, Southern Star, The Echo (Tallaght), Waterford News & Star, Western People, Westmeath Independent, Wexford Echo, Wexford People, Wicklow People, Southside People, Evening Echo, Galway Advertiser, Evening Herald	€73,122

**Table 3**

Radio Stations	Cost
LAOIS – KCLR, KILDARE – KFM, LEITRIM - OCEAN FM, LONGFORD – SHANNONSIDE, MEATH – MIDLANDS, OFFALY – MIDLANDS, TIPPERARY - TIPP FM, CARLOW – KCLR, MONAGHAN - NORTHERN SOUND, ROSCOMMON - SHANNON SIDE, SLIGO - OCEAN FM, MAYO - MIDWEST RADIO, WESTMEATH - MIDLANDS, WEXFORD - SOUTH EAST RADIO, WICKLOW - EAST COAST FM, CORK - 96FM, CORK - C103, DUBLIN - Q102, GALWAY BAY FM, LIMERICK - L95, LOUTH-MEATH - LMFM, WATERFORD - WLR	€170,539

### **Creative Ireland Programme**

274. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the expenditure of the €0.4 million allocated to the development and promotion of [www.ireland.ie](http://www.ireland.ie) and [www.creativeireland.gov.ie](http://www.creativeireland.gov.ie); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53305/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The development of the two informative and high quality websites - [www.creativeireland.gov.ie](http://www.creativeireland.gov.ie) and [www.Ireland.ie](http://www.Ireland.ie) - is essential to the long-term successful promotion and aims of the



Creative Ireland Programme, including Pillar 5 which aims to unify Ireland's global reputation abroad. This is particularly relevant now in the context of Brexit

A sum €0.4m was originally allocated for the development, maintenance and promotion of these two websites. However, this sum was subsequently increased to €0.6m to account for the specially curated and extensive range of digital content commissioned to populate both websites and associated social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram). This content has been used in particular to enhance the Ireland.ie website which aims to present a broad, compelling and inspiring image of Ireland.

The breakdown of expenditure to date in respect of the above websites is as follows:

- Website Development (layout, content production and graphic design) - €192,000
- Digital Content Creation and promotion - €391,000

The creation and dissemination of this content has proved very successful in meeting the aims of the Creative Ireland programme to provide information to citizens and to engage with as broad an audience as possible. For example some of the most viewed videos on the Creative Ireland Facebook page (not including Twitter) include Cruinniú na Cásca (67k views), Oireachtas na Samhna (45k views), Electric Picnic (88k views), Local Authority Workshops (63k views), St Patrick's Festival (107k views). The "This is Ireland" video has attracted over 2m views on Facebook and Twitter in Ireland and abroad.

### **Creative Ireland Programme**

275. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her Department is continuing to finance the cost of the event co-ordinator of the Creative Ireland programme project who is seconded; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53306/17]

276. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her Department is continuing to finance the cost of the director of the Creative Ireland programme project who is seconded; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53307/17]

277. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if the director of the Creative Ireland programme project will return from secondment and or be replaced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53308/17]

278. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when the event co-ordinator of the Creative Ireland programme project will return from secondment and or be replaced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53309/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 275 to 278, inclusive, together.

Both the former Director of Creative Ireland Programme and the former event co-ordinator referred to in the question were seconded to my Department from Fáilte Ireland. They have since been seconded from Fáilte Ireland to the Department of An Taoiseach. This Department no longer covers the costs relating to these posts and any issues in relation to the term of the secondments are a matter between the Department of the Taoiseach and Fáilte Ireland.

My Department has advertised for the position of Director of the Creative Ireland Programme through the public Appointments Service and the recruitment process is ongoing. All other duties relating to the event co-ordinator are currently being managed within existing re-

sources.

### **Creative Ireland Programme**

279. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the names of the two contract staff in the Creative Ireland programme project; the remuneration of each; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53310/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The Department ran an open competition on e-tenders for the provision of

- the supply of services to include the supply, design and implementation of communication strategies and other services as required by the Creative Ireland Programme. MB Arts International won this contract; and

- the supply of services to include the development and management of external partner relationships, such as with local authorities, National Cultural Institutions, etc., and other services as required on behalf of Creative Ireland. Panikos Consulting won this contract.

These services are provided on a daily cost basis and to end November the total costs incurred for the provision of these services was €175,757.

### **Creative Ireland Programme**

280. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the details of the €50,000 miscellaneous costs associated with the Creative Ireland programme project office in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53311/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** A provision for miscellaneous costs was initially included in the Creative Ireland Programme administrative budget as a matter of course to cover any unforeseen costs. However, no such costs have been incurred to date under this provision.

### **Creative Ireland Programme**

281. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the details of the €50,000 travel and subsistence costs associated with the Creative Ireland programme project office in 2017; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53312/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** Travel and subsistence expenses incurred by my Department's Creative Ireland Programme Office to date this year relate to expenses involved in carrying out their everyday responsibilities in accordance with the rates specified in DPER circulars relating to domestic subsistence allowances and subsistence allowances abroad.

Expenses relate to a range of activities associated with the Creative Ireland programme including engagement with Government Departments and public bodies, international engagement under Pillar V of the programme and the extensive consultation programme which was undertaken nationwide earlier this year as part of Pillar II. This involved workshops which were held with all thirty-one local authorities (in some instances more than one workshop in

individual counties) in respect of their Culture and Creative Plans for 2017, setting up Culture Teams in each county, launches of individual county plans, and planning for long-term Culture and Creative Strategies among other events.

### **National Concert Hall**

282. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when she will next meet the CEO and chairperson of the National Concert Hall. [53359/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** As newly appointed Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht I expect to meet the Chairs and CEO's, where appropriate, of all the relevant bodies under the aegis of my Department over the coming period.

### **National Parks and Wildlife Service**

283. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the contact her Department has had with the National Parks and Wildlife Service regarding the introduction of additional wildlife into the Wicklow National Park, in particular harrier hawks; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [53366/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is a unit in the Heritage Division of my Department. Its remit includes the management of six national parks, one of which is Wicklow National Park.

The Harrier-hawk is a bird of prey native to sub-Saharan Africa. There are no plans to introduce this species to Wicklow National Park.

My Department is engaged in conservation efforts nationally to improve the status of the Hen Harrier, a bird of prey native to Ireland. The Hen Harrier nowadays occurs only sporadically in the Wicklow Mountains, but there are no plans to release additional birds into the National Park.

Another bird of prey, the red kite, had become extinct in Ireland, but has been successfully re-introduced into Ireland in Co. Wicklow (though not via the National Parks and Wildlife Service) by the Golden Eagle Trust.

### **Departmental Expenditure**

284. **Deputy Peadar Kirby** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the fund from which the eight-page supplement on creative youth in a newspaper (details supplied) of 8 December 2017 came from; and the cost of same. [53478/17]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** No cost was incurred by my Department for the supplement on Creative Youth in the newspaper referred to in the question.

### **Defence Forces Recruitment**

285. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if a new recruitment drive for the Naval Service will occur in early 2018. [53358/17]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The Government is committed to maintaining the stabilised strength of the Permanent Defence Force at 9,500 personnel, comprising of 7,520 Army, 886 Air Corps and 1,094 Naval Service.

The manpower requirements of the Permanent Defence Force are monitored on an ongoing basis in accordance with the operational requirements of the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service. As there has always been a relatively large turnover of personnel in the Defence Forces, targeted recruitment takes place on a regular basis so as to maintain personnel numbers at or near the agreed strength levels. There is significant ongoing recruitment at both enlisted and officer level and it is anticipated that 800 new personnel will have been inducted into the Permanent Defence Force during 2017. This includes general service recruits, apprentices, cadets and direct entry officers.

As the Permanent Defence Force is currently below the agreed stabilised strength of 9,500, it is intended that targeted recruitment will continue within the resource envelope allocated to Defence. The plans for a General Service Recruitment campaign in 2018 have not been finalised yet.

With the support of the Chief of Staff and within the resources available, I intend to retain the capacity of the Defence Forces to operate effectively across all roles and to undertake the tasks laid down by Government both at home and overseas.