

Written Answers.

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

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

Dublin-Monaghan Bombings

9. **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 Monaghan bombings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3639/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): 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. I acknowledge also 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.

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 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. I discussed the matter with the former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, James Brokenshire, and I will likewise be pursuing the issue directly with the new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Karen Bradley.

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 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 such a response.

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.

Question No. 10 answered orally.

Brexit Issues

11. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the Government has prepared and finalised Brexit sectoral response plans for each Department as committed to in May 2017; if so, if he will publish these plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3688/18]

13. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding the development of adaptive sectoral response plans to Brexit, including plans for stakeholder consultation and publication timelines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3505/18]

39. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his Department has carried out an analysis of the potential impact of Brexit here by county with particular reference to County Wexford. [3492/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 11, 13 and 39 together.

The situation with regard to the Brexit negotiations has evolved significantly since the publication of the Government's comprehensive approach document last May and the Government's preparations have adjusted accordingly. Contingency planning at both a domestic and an EU level is focused on three areas: preparing for a no-deal scenario or so-called "disorderly Brexit"; preparing for a transition period based on the "status quo"; and preparing for the future EU-UK relationship.

While the outcome of the December European Council and the move on to Phase 2 has lessened the likelihood of a disorderly Brexit, very detailed work on a no-deal or worst-case-scenario is advancing intensively through the cross-Departmental coordination structures chaired by my Department.

Before Christmas, the possible consequences for each sector were comprehensively established. Now the work is focusing on possible mitigating measures. This work is also informed by ongoing stakeholder engagement. Separately, a new preparedness unit in the Commission is considering EU-level responses.

All this work provides a baseline scenario for the policies and sectors impacted, which can then be adapted as appropriate in light of developments in the EU-UK negotiations. This includes, as appropriate, any specific responses necessary according to regional needs and at the county level, including in Wexford.

That is why the decision has been taken to concentrate on completing this work and to participate in the preparation of the EU approach to the future relationship negotiations.

As concerns transitional arrangements, I welcome that the direction of travel is now firmly towards achieving a "status quo" transition period. Agreement on a "status quo" transition will provide certainty to individuals and businesses while also aiming to avoid any cliff edge effects between the UK leaving the EU and a future relationship agreement coming into force.

The expectation is that the European Council will adopt additional Guidelines at its meeting

on 22-23 March 2018 on the framework for the future EU-UK relationship. These guidelines – as well as further clarity on the UK position, which has been sought by the European Council – will provide a clearer picture of the direction of travel in the negotiations. This will provide a basis on which the Government will publish a new paper in the coming months on our approach to the negotiations and our latest assessment of the economic and sectoral challenges posed by Brexit and our responses to them.

This work will, of course, be firmly grounded in the extensive work and outreach that has already been undertaken by individual Departments and agencies, as well as by stakeholder organisations, academics and others. Much of this is in the public domain, including the detailed response plan “Building Stronger Business - Responding to Brexit by competing, innovation and trading”, which was published in November. A number of further important studies are underway with a view to publication in the coming weeks and months.

Middle East Issues

12. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will request the release of a person (details supplied); his views on the position of UNICEF that the ill-treatment of Palestinian children in military detention is widespread, systematic and institutionalised; his further views on the fact that Israel is the only nation that systematically detains and prosecutes children in a military court system; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3504/18]

28. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has discussed the detention of Palestinian children and teenagers by the Israeli authorities with Israeli representatives here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3653/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 12 and 28 together.

The overall human rights situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including the treatment of children in detention, remains a matter of concern. Ireland has repeatedly drawn attention to concerns regarding the treatment of Palestinian prisoners. We have paid particular attention over recent years to issues related to the detention of minors. Ireland also provides financial support to Israeli and Palestinian NGOs who are active in bringing these issues to light.

I am aware of the issues raised by UNICEF, including in the February 2013 UNICEF report, entitled “Children in Israeli Military Detention”. I would urge the Israeli authorities, in accordance with their obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to use detention only as a means of last resort, and for the shortest appropriate period of time, in the case of minors.

During my visit to the Middle East last week, I again raised Ireland’s concerns about the detention of minors directly with the Israeli authorities, including the issues of night-time arrests and blindfolding.

Ireland has also raised these issues at EU level and in international fora, including during the Universal Periodic Review of Israel at the UN Human Rights Council in 2013. In the most recent Universal Periodic Review of Israel, earlier this week, Ireland raised the issue of administrative detention, and made recommendations on the rights of detainees.

My Department and I will continue to press on these issues in the relevant multilateral fora,

and also, where appropriate, directly with Israel.

In relation to the specific case referred to by the Deputies, an Irish diplomatic representative was present at the person in question's hearing in Ofer military court in the West Bank on 20 December, along with other international representatives. My Department will continue to monitor that case and others.

Question No. 13 answered with Question No. 11.

Middle East Issues

14. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the most recent developments in Palestine regarding the possible withdrawal of recognising the state of Israel that was made at an international conference in Madrid in 1991 will be discussed with his other EU colleagues at the next EU Council meeting. [3057/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) recognized Israel in 1993, as part of the Oslo Accords, which also set out a path towards a two-state solution. There has understandably been a strong reaction among Palestinians to the US decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. I have made clear that I believe the US announcement was premature and unhelpful. The EU has reaffirmed our belief in a two state solution, with Jerusalem as a capital for both Israel and Palestine. At the January meeting of the PLO Central Council there was evidently deep frustration not just at the US announcement, but also at the lack of progress over two decades in building on the Oslo Accords. Some statements made at the Central Council included inflammatory rhetoric. The Central Council also decided to assign the Executive Committee of the PLO to suspend recognition of Israel, pending reciprocal recognition of a State of Palestine.

However, this decision has not yet been implemented. It will be for President Abbas to decide whether to act on this recommendation, and so far, he has not done so. I believe that the international community should focus on actions, not rhetoric. I note that President Abbas reaffirmed his opposition to terrorism in all forms, in the course of the Council.

My EU colleagues and I met again with President Abbas at the Foreign Affairs Council on Monday. Our conviction that it would be a major step back to withdraw recognition of Israel was clear. We also reiterated our support for the two state solution, as an outcome of an agreement between the parties.

I very strongly urge President Abbas to maintain Palestinian recognition of Israel, something which the PLO has accepted since 1993.

Middle East Issues

15. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to invite a delegation from the Parliament in Gaza to meet with an all party delegation in Dáil Éireann. [3495/18]

29. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to arrange an all-party delegation to visit the Parliament in Gaza; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3494/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I pro-

pose to take Questions Nos. 15 and 29 together.

The Palestinian Parliament, known as the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), was elected in 2006, but it has not held a regular session since 2007. There is a PLC building in Gaza, but Gaza does not have its own parliament, as such.

The occupied Palestinian territory is made up of both the West Bank and Gaza, and Ireland fully supports the unity of that territory. I welcome the recent progress towards a full return by the Palestinian Authority to Gaza, an effort that would restore a unified Palestinian Authority Government. I conveyed my support for this process directly to President Abbas during my visit to the Middle East earlier this month. I was very happy to be able to have a meeting with a Palestinian Authority Minister in Gaza during my visit, as a sign that that process is underway. In both meetings, I reaffirmed Ireland's commitment to working to end the blockade in Gaza, and to help provide positive prospects for young people there.

Following the 2006 election, the EU recognised as legitimate the Palestinian Government subsequently formed by Hamas, but also exercised its own right not to engage directly with members of Hamas, while it remains committed to an armed struggle. Ireland and the EU do engage fully with the current Palestinian Government, which is committed to pursuing the objective of a two state solution by purely peaceful means. It is for the Oireachtas, not the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, to make arrangements for incoming or outgoing visits of parliamentary delegations. I would be happy to see Oireachtas cooperation with any Palestinian representatives who are committed to the peaceful achievement of a two state solution. I would note that my Department currently advises Irish citizens strongly against all travel to the Gaza Strip for security reasons.

Election Monitoring Missions

16. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress made on producing a new roster for election monitoring with an open transparent scoring form that will be available to those that were unsuccessful; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3667/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): International election monitoring missions play an important role in the promotion of democracy and human rights. Accordingly, my Department maintains a roster of potential participants in election monitoring missions. The aim is to ensure that, in response to requests for Irish participation in international missions observing elections and certain referenda, that there is a pool of adequately experienced people who could contribute effectively to such missions on either a short or long term basis. Irish observers participate primarily in missions organised by the European Union and also those organized by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). A roster of 200 people was established in May 2013 for a period of five years, following a review of the previous roster and a public call for applications. Plans are well advanced with regard to the establishment of a new roster to come into operation later this year. Final preparations are being put in place to permit a public call for applications to issue in the coming weeks. This will be published on both the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Irish Aid websites. Those who have previously expressed an interest in applying to join the roster will also be advised when the call is published. A candidate information booklet setting out all of the necessary details including the eligibility requirements and the process leading to the establishment of the roster will be made available to all applicants. My Department will run this campaign in accordance with best practice and candidate score sheets will be made available to the candidates concerned.

Question No. 17 answered with Question No. 6.

Middle East Issues

18. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent of the engagement of the Foreign Affairs Council regarding the continuing humanitarian crisis in Yemen caused by extreme violence; and his plans to engage with those that oppose the death sentence facing a person (details supplied). [3666/18]

46. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the United Nations Children’s Fund’s (UNICEF’s) latest report *Born into War* and that more than 11 million children now need humanitarian assistance; his views on an arms embargo on Saudi Arabia and other necessary measures to create a peaceful political solution to the conflict; and the way in which his Department will respond to UNICEF’s appeal for US \$312 million in 2018 to continue responding to the urgent needs of children in Yemen. [3644/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 18 and 46 together.

I am extremely concerned about the current situation in Yemen, which is the world’s largest humanitarian crisis. The war is now ongoing for over one thousand days, and has had devastating consequences for civilians, with allegations of violations of human rights international humanitarian law, and significant loss of life. I am aware of the UNICEF report referred to by the Deputy, and share his concern that children are bearing the brunt of the conflict in Yemen, with nearly every child in the country currently in need of humanitarian assistance.

Ireland has provided over €11 million in humanitarian assistance to Yemen since 2015, and we are committed to maintaining support. In 2017, Irish funding of over €5 million was allocated to the UN’s Yemen Humanitarian Pooled Fund (YHPF), which supports NGOs and UN agencies, including UNICEF, which have the best capacity to deliver services on the ground. Furthermore, the EU is the largest humanitarian donor to Yemen and has provided over €170 million in aid since the conflict began, to which Ireland contributes via the EU Development Budget. In addition, Ireland provided €7.2 million in core global funding to UNICEF in 2017, and has pledged a further €7.2 million for 2018.

I believe that only way to bring about a long-term sustainable improvement in the situation for the Yemeni people is through a negotiated end to this conflict. Ireland fully supports the efforts of UN Special Envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed and his team, who are working towards a peace agreement.

With regard to an arms embargo on Saudi Arabia, Ireland does not have an arms industry and therefore does not export arms to Saudi Arabia. On the problems posed by arms transfers to conflict regions generally, our efforts are concentrated on universalisation and implementation of the 2014 Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which has been signed and ratified by all EU Member States. In addition, the EU’s Common Position on Arms Exports contains 8 risk assessment criteria that all EU countries must apply to their licensing decisions for exports of military goods.

My predecessor, Minister Flanagan, raised concerns about the conduct of the war in Yemen and the humanitarian impact with Ministerial counterparts in Saudi Arabia and UAE on a number of occasions. More recently, officials from my Department met with the Saudi Embassy in Dublin late last year, and passed on my strong concerns in relation to humanitarian access. There have also been EU contacts with Saudi Arabia on this issue. At the Foreign Affairs Coun-

on 11 December, I urged stronger EU action on humanitarian access in Yemen, and I will continue to raise these concerns with all appropriate interlocutors whenever opportunities arise.

As regards the death sentence of a Baha'i individual to which the Deputy has referred, I am concerned that this person appears to have been sentenced on the basis of his religious beliefs. Ireland strongly condemns all forms of persecution on the basis of religion or belief, and is unequivocal in its stance on the death penalty. Ireland calls on all parties in Yemen to immediately release all Baha'i detained due to their religious belief, and to cease the harassment to which they are subjected. We will continue to monitor the situation closely.

I would like to assure the Deputy that Ireland will continue to take every appropriate opportunity to press for a negotiated settlement to the conflict in Yemen, as well as respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, and improved humanitarian access.

Ministerial Meetings

19. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his recent visit to Israel and Palestine; if he drew the attention of the Israeli Prime Minister to Ireland's opposition to Israel's occupation of Palestine and the apartheid regime that Israel enforces in Palestine; if he will request that the State officially recognises the state of Palestine; and if he will request the release of a person (details supplied). [3643/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Earlier this month, I visited Israel and Palestine for the second time in my role Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. I met with key representatives of the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, as well as leaders of other Israeli political parties, UN agencies, and non-governmental organisations. In my meetings with the Israeli authorities, I expressed Ireland's concerns about the impact of the continuing occupation, including settlement construction, and the detention of minors. I had a frank discussion with Prime Minister Netanyahu about the prospects for returning to negotiations between the parties, and some of the impacts of the occupation on Palestinians, especially in Gaza.

I also had the opportunity to meet with Palestinian President Abbas, and Foreign Minister Malki, with whom I discussed the challenges facing the Palestinian people, the prospects for reinvigorating peace negotiations, and efforts to restore the Palestinian Authority to its role in Gaza – work that I encouraged and supported.

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 recognize 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.

I have not yet concluded that immediate recognition by Ireland would be a helpful step, but I keep this matter under continuous review, particularly in the light of the views expressed by the Dáil and the Seanad in 2014.

During my visit to Israel and Palestine, I raised concerns about the detention of minors with the Israeli authorities. I am aware of the case raised by the Deputy and I refer you to my reply to Question [3504/18 – no. 8 on the order paper].

Election Monitoring Missions

20. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 44 of 13 December 2017, his plans to use his influence at EU and UN levels and via the EU delegation in Tegucigalpa, to request the Honduran Government to cease all violent attacks on citizens, human rights defenders, the media and the clergy and support fresh elections as called for by the Organisation of American States. [3669/18]

42. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the violent repression of demonstrations that are protesting the disputed recent presidential election results in Honduras; his further views on the fact that the EU election observer mission to Honduras report has still not been released and that the Organisation of American States has called for fresh elections; when the EU election observer mission to Honduras report will be released; and his views on whether the inauguration of Juan Orlando Hernandez on 27 January 2018 should be postponed due to the alleged fraudulent November 2017 election and fresh elections called. [3646/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 20 and 42 together.

The loss of life and violence following elections which took place in Honduras on 26 November 2017 are a cause for concern. I have not hesitated to condemn unreservedly this or any violence perpetrated against those seeking to defend their rights or peacefully demonstrate. My sincere condolences are with the families of the victims and with all of those who have suffered violence in the aftermath of the elections.

Freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are the cornerstones of any functioning democracy and those rights must be guaranteed. All sides in Honduras must work within the political system to deliver the political reforms necessary to secure the trust of the Honduran people in the country’s institutions.

I echo the statement made on 19 January by the spokesperson for the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, calling for the Honduran authorities to “undertake an assessment of the rules of engagement, including the use of force, and for the security forces to use only necessary and proportionate force, in line with international law, in policing demonstrations”.

While Ireland does not have diplomatic representation in Honduras, officials at my Department engage closely with the European External Action Service working through its EU delegation in Tegucigalpa, and meet with human rights defenders and civil society organisations active in that country. Ireland contributed one long-term observer and one short-term observer to the EU Election Observer Mission to Honduras last year. This was facilitated by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Officials of the Department conducted a debrief with the Irish observers in early January. In its preliminary statement, the EU Observer Mission gave a generally positive evaluation of the organisation of the elections, while at the same time noting the negative public perception of the neutrality of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal and the disparity in resources enjoyed by one candidate compared with competitors.

The EU Observer Mission will deliver its final report on the election in the coming weeks. Given the technical nature of the reporting and related recommendations, it is not uncommon for such reports to take several months to finalise.

I urge the Government of Honduras to take on board and adopt any recommendations made by the EU Mission in order to help to restore much-needed public confidence in future electoral processes in the country.

I can assure the Deputies that we will continue to monitor the situation closely and maintain contact with actors on the ground in Honduras in the weeks and months ahead. Ireland remains committed to raising issues pertaining to the defence of human rights in Honduras both at EU and UN level.

Departmental Strategies

21. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will further elaborate on his plans to double Ireland's global footprint by 2025; the criteria being used to determine the way in which this strategic plan will be achieved; if this plan has been fully costed; if funding has been ringfenced for this plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3685/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Department of the Taoiseach is leading a steering group of relevant Departments and agencies and is coordinating the Government's plan to double Ireland's global footprint by 2025. This will be ready for consideration by Government in the coming weeks, and it is envisaged that the initiative will be launched to coincide with the St Patrick's Day period. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade will feed into, and support, this process. Our expanded network will enhance Ireland's visibility globally, extending our influence and will position us for trade and investment growth in new and existing markets. It will also benefit travelling citizens and engagement with the Diaspora and will involve reaching out to our Diaspora and exploring new and creative platforms for engagement. Expanding our presence and influence abroad is also about a broader re-doubling of our effort in the fight against global poverty and hunger and for sustainable development through the Irish Aid programme.

In addition to the broadening of our Diplomatic Network the Department is also taking steps to deepen the existing network, including in key areas to address the impact of the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

The question of costs for 2018 was considered as part of the annual Departmental budgetary process. €2 million was allocated in Budget 2018 to cover initial outlays incurred by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Any additional expenditure for future years will be decided via the Departmental budgetary process. Decisions on expenditure will be consistent with value for money principles and provide clear benefits for the State and will depend on a range of factors, including staff and accommodation needs.

Work has begun on the initial phase of the expansion of Ireland's Diplomatic Network which includes the Government decision to open new Embassies in Santiago, Chile; Bogotá, Colombia; Amman, Jordan; and Wellington, New Zealand; and new Consulates General in Vancouver, Canada and Mumbai, India.

Middle East Issues

22. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when Ireland will officially recognise the state of Palestine; the reason for the delay in doing so in view of the unanimous passing of a motion by Dáil Éireann on 10 December 2014 requesting the Government to do so; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3651/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): As stated previously, in this House and elsewhere, the Government is committed to recognising

the State of Palestine as part of a lasting settlement of the conflict. In all of my meetings during my recent visit to Israel and Palestine – with Israelis, Palestinians, and UN partners – I conveyed the importance the Irish people attach to the resolution of the Middle East Peace Process. Ireland, along with our EU partners, supports the achievement of a two state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that meets Israeli and Palestinian security needs and Palestinian aspirations for statehood and sovereignty, ends the occupation that began in 1967, and resolves all permanent status issues in order to end 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, some have suggested 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.

Brexit Issues

23. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of his negotiations, particularly those relating to the Border region of counties Cavan and Monaghan, in view of Brexit and the possible reintroduction of a hard border. [3638/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government's priority of protecting the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts and the gains of the peace process, including avoiding a hard border on this island, has always been clear. In this regard, the Government welcomed the decision of the European Council on 15 December 2017 that sufficient progress had been made in phase one of the Article 50 negotiations. In phase one we secured concrete commitments on the protection of the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts and the gains of the peace process. We have also secured clear and strong commitments on avoiding a hard border and the UK has set 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, the UK has committed that "in the absence of agreed solutions, the United Kingdom will maintain full alignment with those rules of the Internal Market and 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 arrangements put in place will be accompanied by effective mechanisms to ensure implementation and oversight. The importance of avoiding a hard border to people living in all the border counties, including Cavan and Monaghan, cannot be underestimated and the Government is acutely conscious of this. The North South cooperation we enjoy today brings tangible benefits to the daily lives of people in the border region and contributes to economic opportunity and development. It is

also a very practical outworking of the peace process which allows for the normalisation of relationships between people across the island, to mutual benefit. It is for these reasons that there cannot be a return to border infrastructure of any kind on this island.

It has been agreed that the Irish specific issues will continue to be taken forward in a distinct strand of the negotiations in phase two. This will ensure that they will not be overlooked in the next phase and that work will continue on how to protect the Good Friday Agreement and the peace process and avoid a hard border, based on the agreements reached in phase one and in parallel with the wider negotiations on scoping out the EU's future relationship with the UK. It has also been agreed to start drafting the relevant parts of the Withdrawal Agreement, which is an important next step as the Agreement will be legally binding and will reflect the principles and commitments agreed in phase one.

As a committed member of the EU, Ireland has engaged fully in the negotiations, as part of the EU27 team and will continue to do so in phase two.

Ministerial Communications

24. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has expressed his views publically or to the United States administration with regard to President Trump's recent derogatory remarks regarding African and Caribbean countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3496/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the reported remarks by President Trump on Thursday, 11 January. I obviously completely disagree with the tenor and substance of those alleged comments. The immigrant experience has particular resonance for Irish people and Irish emigrants know what it is to not feel welcomed in a strange country. Our own experience of emigration from Ireland - and, in recent years, immigration to Ireland - has also given us an appreciation of the very positive contribution that migrants can make to a society, regardless of their background or nationality. That experience is reflected in our relations with other States, including with the United States with whom we share a commitment to the values of democracy and the rule of law, as well as respect for the rights and dignity of all, irrespective of origin, religion, or ethnicity.

Israeli Settlements

25. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he formally raised the expansion of illegal settlements with the Israeli Prime Minister during his recent visit to the Middle East; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3689/18]

41. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his recent visit to Palestine and Israel; if the continuing building of settlements was discussed; and if he engaged with those working on reconciliation. [3668/18]

43. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his visit to Palestine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3493/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 25, 41 and 43 together.

Earlier this month I undertook a four-day working visit to the Middle East, with meetings in Cairo, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Ramallah and Gaza. In my visit to Israel and Palestine, I met with key representatives of the Government of Israel and of the Palestinian Authority, as well as leaders of other Israeli political parties, our partners in UN agencies, and non-governmental organisations. In all of these meetings I conveyed the importance the Irish people attach to the resolution of the Middle East Peace Process, something that has been a priority for me personally since I took office.

In my meetings with the Israeli authorities, I expressed Ireland's concerns about the impact of the continuing occupation, including settlement construction. I had a frank discussion with Prime Minister Netanyahu about the prospects for returning to negotiations between the parties, and how Ireland and the EU can play a constructive role in the MEPP. I set out the urgent need to break the downward spiral of the situation in Gaza, which is clearly unsustainable, and talked about ways in which it could be alleviated. I put on record my view that to bar individuals from Israel, on the basis that they hold views critical of the Government's policies, is not the way to deal with criticism.

I also had the opportunity to meet with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, and Foreign Minister Malki, with whom I discussed the challenges facing the Palestinian people, and the prospects for reinvigorating the effort towards peace in the Middle East. I also heard about work to restore the Palestinian Authority to its role in Gaza, giving Palestinians a unified Government, an effort that I encouraged and supported. The Irish Government has for many years consistently supported the objective of Palestinian reconciliation. I also met with the UNRWA Commissioner General, Pierre Krähenbühl, and with representatives of OCHA, and to hear first-hand about their work and the challenges they face.

I was very pleased to be able to meet in Gaza with the Palestinian Authority Minister for Public Works and Housing, as a sign that efforts to restore the Palestinian Authority role in Gaza are underway. I also met there with officials from UNRWA and the OHCHR, as well as representatives of civil society. I saw at first hand the effects of the blockade, and the effects that this is having on young people's prospects and hopes, leading to a dangerous sense of despair. I reaffirmed Ireland's commitment to working to end this situation.

International Agreements

26. Deputy David Cullinane asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to international plans for the potential return of 100,000 Rohingya to Myanmar and that this is occurring without a clear understanding of their legal status and concrete protections for security and protection; the steps his Department is taking to assist Rohingya refugees; and his views on the detention of persons (details supplied) in Myanmar that were working on the military crackdown in Rakhine state and the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya. [3645/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the recent repatriation agreement signed between the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar to provide for the repatriation of refugees, predominantly members of the Myanmar Rohingya community, currently living in refugee camps in Bangladesh having fled Myanmar over the last number of months. Officials from my Department continue to closely monitor developments and the Government is very engaged on this issue both at EU level and with our international partners. While I welcome efforts being made to provide a path for the return of refugees to their place of origin in Myanmar, it is vital that any such efforts be carried out in a safe, dignified, and voluntary manner and that the UN be part of any repatriation scheme. I

emphasise the importance of recognising the status of those who have fled as refugees and the full application of international refugee law to their individual cases; in particular insisting that any repatriation must be voluntary. In this regard I note recent news that efforts to begin repatriations this month have been delayed by the Government of Bangladesh. To ensure the safety and dignity of those returning, repatriations should only occur when there are appropriate conditions created on the ground in Rakhine State, in line with the findings of the Annan Commission and with the assistance of the international community.

Ireland is committed to supporting these refugees and the international humanitarian response triggered by the mass movement of refugees into Bangladesh. Last October, we pledged €2m in direct support at the Pledging Conference for the Rohingya Refugee Crisis in Geneva. €1m was provided in 2017, and an additional €1m will be allocated in 2018. In addition Ireland's Rapid Response Corps are providing humanitarian expertise to the international response.

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 large number of refugees who are now situated in Bangladesh.

The recent detention of two Reuters journalists in Yangon is also a cause of serious concern. Freedom of the press and media is a cornerstone of any democracy, and Ireland opposes any attempts to curtail these freedoms. We expect the Myanmar authorities to ensure the full protection of their rights and to release the journalists as quickly as possible.

Brexit Negotiations

27. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he or his officials have discussed phase two of the Brexit negotiations with the British Government at ministerial or official level. [3055/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Brexit is an issue that naturally arises during the frequent bilateral contacts which I, my government colleagues and our officials have with our UK counterparts. While stressing that Ireland is a member of the EU27 and that the issues involved can only be substantively considered and addressed through the ongoing EU-UK negotiations, I have welcomed the opportunity that such discussions have provided to build the UK's understanding of Ireland's concerns and priorities with regard to the Irish-specific issues as well as the future EU-UK relationship. I have discussed Brexit with both the current Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Karen Bradley, and her predecessor, James Brokenshire. Engagements at Ministerial level in recent months where Brexit has featured on the agenda have included meetings with the UK's Secretary of State for Exiting the EU, David Davis, with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond, and with the UK's Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson.

Question No. 28 answered with Question No. 12.

Question No. 29 answered with Question No. 15.

EU Issues

30. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the way in which interested persons from County Kildare and surrounding counties can con-

tribute to the ongoing dialogue on the future of Europe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3564/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): As the Deputy will be aware, the Taoiseach launched the Citizens' Dialogue on the future of Europe in November. The dialogue was established to address the needs and concerns of Irish citizens on the future direction of the European Union and the feedback from these sessions will help formulate our own contribution to the wider European debate. My colleague the Minister for European Affairs, Helen McEntee T.D., is leading on the citizens' dialogue and has written to all Oireachtas members setting out in detail how the Citizens' Dialogue process will work, and how people can get involved. The first session will be in Galway next month and other venues will be Cork, Donegal and Meath. The final dialogue will be held in Dublin on Europe Day, 9 May. A website – www.dfa.ie/eu - and a twitter handle #futureofeu have been set up to facilitate the process. Those interested in attending at any of the above venues should register online. We would be very pleased if all members of the Oireachtas could help spread the work and encourage the widest possible participation at each session.

Syrian Conflict

31. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the contact which has been made with the UN regarding the attacks on 9 January 2018 by Israeli missiles on Syrian army positions near Damascus (details supplied); if he has requested the UN Security Council to investigate these breaches of international peace; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3365/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the attack on an arms depot outside Damascus on 9 January and I understand that the Syrian Foreign Ministry has written to the UN Security Council and UN Secretary-General regarding this incident. The conflict in Syria, which is now approaching its eighth year, has been extremely destabilising for the wider region. I call on all parties to exercise restraint in order to avoid any further destabilisation of the region. I had the opportunity to discuss the conflict and its impact during my recent visit to the Middle East, including with the Secretary General of the League of Arab States and the Egyptian Foreign Minister. Clearly, a comprehensive, inclusive political solution to the conflict is urgently needed, both to end the suffering of the Syrian people and to prevent any further turmoil in the region. The UN is leading political negotiations to end the conflict based on the 2012 Geneva Communique and UN Security Council resolution 2254, which calls for an end to violence; release of political prisoners; formation of a transitional governing body with executive powers and a constitutional reform process. Ireland fully supports this process and the work of UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura. The EU provides direct assistance to the UN-led Geneva peace talks and has launched, in coordination with the UN, an initiative to develop political dialogue with key actors from the region to identify common ground.

Ireland and the EU also provide support, including financial support, to a broad range of mechanisms to ensure legal accountability for all war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria. Attacks on civilians, including attacks on medical facilities and civilian infrastructure, attacks resulting in the deaths of children and the use of chemical weapons are particularly horrifying features of this tragic conflict.

Ireland has consistently called for the situation in Syria to be referred to the ICC, and in 2016, Ireland and a group of like-minded countries successfully pushed for a UN General Assembly resolution establishing an International Impartial and Independent Mechanism to assist

in the investigation and prosecution of persons responsible for the most serious crimes under international law committed in Syria. Ireland made a contribution of €100,000 to support the establishment of this mechanism last year.

I participated in the discussion at the December EU Foreign Affairs Council on the discussion of the regional situation in the Middle East, including of course the urgent need for progress towards peace in Syria. I joined colleagues in stressing the primacy of the UN-led Geneva process and the need for an inclusive political transition in Syria.

Passport Services

32. Deputy Darragh O'Brien asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to open a regional passport office in the Border region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3686/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Passport Service offers a range of convenient channels for submission of passport applications by Irish citizens, at home and abroad. Advice and guidance on these channels and other useful information on passports is available on the Department's website at <https://www.dfa.ie/passports> The award-winning online Passport Renewal Service for adults was launched in March 2017 and offers the convenience of an online application system 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for Irish citizens anywhere in the world, without the need for application forms, printed photos or witnesses. People who cannot or do not wish to apply online have the option of applying through their local post office. In 2017, over 400,000 citizens availed of this option and submitted their passport application through the network of more than one thousand post offices across the State. The Northern Ireland Passport Express service offers an equivalent service to those living in Northern Ireland from more than 70 of its post offices.

Bearing in mind the availability of both the online and postal application channels, very few citizens living in the island of Ireland are required to travel a significant distance in order to apply for their passport.

In the relatively small number of cases where citizens need to travel very urgently and do not have a valid passport, the Passport Offices in Dublin and Cork offer an appointment service.

The Passport Service keeps passport demand under review on an ongoing basis. It is already planned to further extend the online application facility to all citizens, including first-time applicants and children, by 2019.

In all the circumstances, I am satisfied that the range of service options available meets the current needs of passport applicants.

Human Rights

33. Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will raise the issue of human rights on his official visit to China and Hong Kong for St Patrick's Day; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3497/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ireland regularly raises human rights issues with third countries, including with the People's Republic of China. Human rights issues are discussed with the Chinese authorities during bilateral meetings, including at the highest levels such as the visit of Premier Li Keqiang to Ireland in 2015;

through EU engagement with China; and through multilateral channels. As planning is still in the early stages for my visit to China for St Patrick's Day 2018, it is not yet possible for me to comment precisely on the programme. The Deputy will note that the purpose of Ministerial visits overseas for St Patrick's Day is to promote Ireland and Irish business across the world. The promotion of Ireland's "global footprint" expansion has also been identified as a key priority this year, as well as the reinforcing of messages on Brexit, Northern Ireland, Ireland's campaign to become a member of the UN Security Council in 2021-22, and the strength of the Irish economy.

Passport Applications Data

34. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the turnaround time for passport applications processed through the Cork passport office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3647/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Passport Service located in my Department is one unified service composed of 3 constituent offices in Dublin (Balbriggan and Mount Street) and Cork. The distribution of work across the 3 passport offices does not impact on members of the public or in any way limit the options available to the public in terms of passport application channels. Under the current distribution of tasks across the Service, all Passport Express applications are now processed in the Balbriggan office, while the Cork office processes applications from Northern Ireland and Great Britain, as well as applications submitted at Ireland's network of Embassies and Consulates worldwide. Online passport renewal applications are processed in the Mount Street office. The Mount Street and Cork public offices also continue to accept applications from all categories of applicants, by appointment, at the public counter and, where appropriate, facilitate the issuance of emergency passports. The processing times for all applications is updated weekly on the Passport Service website www.dfa.ie/passporttracking/turnaroundtimes/.

The Online Passport Renewal Service is available for adult Irish citizens renewing their passport and is available twenty four hours a day, seven days a week from anywhere in the world. The target turnaround time for Online Passport Renewal applications is 10 days plus postage – online applications are currently being processed and completed well below this deadline.

The Passport Service aims to process applications for renewal of passports submitted via Passport Express within 15 working days. The current turnaround times for both renewal and first time applications submitted through Passport Express is within our target timeframe at 15 working days. Northern Ireland Passport Express renewal applications are currently being processed in 13 working days, with first time applications and those with lost/stolen passports processed in 15 working days.

The average processing time for renewal applications from Great Britain is 21 working days, while first time applicants and those with lost/stolen passports are currently being processed in 31 working days. Applications submitted via Ireland's network of Embassies and Consulates abroad are currently being processed in 29 working days.

Different categories of applications take longer to process, due to additional checks and/or additional time in transit, such as first time applicants, those applying via overseas Embassies and Consulates as well as those with lost/stolen passports.

The Passport Service monitors demand and resources on an ongoing basis and continues to

takes all possible steps to ensure an effective service to the public.

The majority of applications submitted at the Cork public counter are from applicants travelling inside 15 working days. Depending on travel needs, these applications are generally processed within 3 – 10 working days.

The Passport Service strongly advises all applicants to check their passport when making travel plans, to check the Passport Service website www.dfa.ie/passport for the most appropriate channel through which to submit their application and to allow a minimum of 6 weeks when applying for their passport.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

35. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the position regarding the efforts being made on the needs of the undocumented Irish in the United States of America; the extent to which ongoing negotiations continue to take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3690/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government continues to seek a solution to the plight of thousands of undocumented Irish citizens resident in the US, and avails of all opportunities to raise US immigration reform and the status of the undocumented Irish with the US administration and with contacts on Capitol Hill. The forthcoming Ministerial visits to the United States over the St. Patrick's Day period will provide an important opportunity to raise this issue with key stakeholders across the United States, including in Washington, D.C. Officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, working both here and in the US, are engaged on this important issue on an ongoing basis and are always on the alert for any new initiatives that might be under consideration by the US authorities, and how these might benefit Irish citizens. In this regard, officials based at our Embassy in D.C. have been working closely with Deputy John Deasy in his role as the Government's Special Envoy to Congress on the Undocumented. They also remain in regular contact with Ireland's friends in the Administration and on Capitol Hill. Deputy Deasy is in Washington, D.C. this week, 22-26 January, to conduct a series of meetings on the issue of the undocumented.

I can assure the Deputy 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 thousands of undocumented and to their families in Ireland.

Northern Ireland

36. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his meeting with the new British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Ms Karen Bradley, in London on 12 January 2018; if he drew her attention to the fact that the political institutions will only work if they are based on delivering equality, integrity and respect for all; and the steps his Department is taking to ensure that the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent agreements are implemented in full. [3642/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): As 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, while the other parties represented in the Assembly also have a critical role to play here. I met with the newly-appointed Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Karen Bradley, in London on 12 January and in Belfast on 18 January. We discussed how both Governments, as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, can support the parties in resolving the outstanding issues and moving ahead to form a new Executive.

The Secretary of State and I agree that there remain challenges for the parties in reaching that agreement, but we also recognise the wish of each of the parties to see the devolved power-sharing institutions continuing to operate.

Northern Ireland has now been without a functioning devolved government for more than a year. This is not a position that can be sustained for much longer.

Secretary of State Bradley and I held a round of meetings with the parties at Stormont yesterday, commencing a further round of intensive engagement to secure the formation of a new Executive.

On the basis of this engagement with the parties yesterday and in view of the progress that has been made in discussions in various formats over recent months, I continue to believe that an agreement to form a new Executive can be achieved.

We all have a responsibility over the coming weeks to make every possible effort to secure the effective operation of the devolved power-sharing institutions.

Secretary of State Bradley and I will work in partnership to achieve this and spare no effort in seeking a return to devolved power-sharing government in Northern Ireland, which is at the heart of the Good Friday Agreement.

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 Government is also strongly committed to the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, as reflected in the Programme for Partnership Government. It is through the operation of the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement that the full implementation of the Agreement can be most effectively and comprehensively achieved.

The Taoiseach and I will therefore continue to engage with the British Government and the parties in Northern Ireland in the period immediately ahead to support the urgent formation of a new Executive by the mandated political parties.

Passport Services

37. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the efficiency of the passport service following the removal of the passport express service from the Cork passport office; if he will publish the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3648/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Passport Service located in my Department is one unified service composed of 3 constituent offices in Dublin (Balbriggan and Mount Street) and Cork. Occasionally work is redistributed between these 3 offices, on the basis of demand and availability of resources. The distribution of work across the 3 passport offices does not impact on members of the public or in any way or limit the options available to the public in terms of passport application channels. Under the

current distribution of tasks across the Service, all Passport Express applications are now processed in the Balbriggan office, while the Cork office processes applications from Northern Ireland and Great Britain, as well as applications submitted at Ireland's network of Embassies and Consulates worldwide. Online passport renewal applications are processed in the Mount Street office. The Mount Street and Cork public offices also continue to accept applications from all categories of applicants, by appointment, at the public counter and, where appropriate, facilitate the issuance of emergency passports. The Online Passport Renewal Service is available for adult Irish citizens renewing their passport and is available twenty four hours a day, seven days a week from anywhere in the world. The target turnaround time for Online Passport Renewal applications is 10 days plus postage – online applications are currently being processed and completed well below this deadline.

The Passport Service aims to process applications for renewal of passports submitted via Passport Express within 15 working days. The current turnaround times for both renewal and first time applications submitted through Passport Express is within our target timeframe at 15 working days.

Other categories of applications take longer to process, due to additional checks and/or additional time in transit, such as first time applicants, those applying via overseas Embassies and Consulates as well as those with lost/stolen passports.

The Passport Service monitors demand and resources on an ongoing basis and continues to take all possible steps to ensure an effective service to the public.

Brexit Issues

38. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the consideration that was given to assisting Ireland in relation to Brexit in the St Patrick's Day travel plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3691/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I was pleased to announce the 'Promote Ireland' programme of St Patrick's Day Ministerial visits on 16 January. St. Patrick's Day provides Ireland with an unparalleled opportunity to promote our political and economic interests abroad, as well as access to key political and business contacts in leading markets around world. Delivering a comprehensive, strategic approach to high-level visits and trade missions, including St. Patrick's Day Ministerial programmes, is a key commitment of the Government's trade strategy Ireland Connected, launched in March 2017 and an outcome of the recent Team Ireland Conference. This year, the Taoiseach, Government Ministers, Chief Whip and I will participate in programmes to promote Ireland and Irish interests in more than 30 countries across the globe during the St Patrick's Day period. The majority of the destinations chosen are priority markets for Ireland's trade, tourism and investment interests, where a high-level political presence will reinforce the year-round promotional efforts of our diplomatic teams and state agencies in market. Ministerial visits to the EU have been prioritised in 2018 given the importance of building strategic alliances in the context of Phase II of the Brexit negotiations and, looking forward, a post-Brexit European Union. Ministerial programmes will also provide an opportunity to explore market diversification opportunities for Irish companies. I expect that Ministers will visit 14 EU capitals over the St Patrick's period. A comprehensive list of destinations for 'Promote Ireland' Ministerial programmes has been published on the website of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. In advance of this year's St. Patrick's Day programme, to ensure a coordinated approach to activity, a set of key messages, including on Brexit, will be provided to Ministers and our Embassy network abroad in advance of Saint Patrick's Day.

This year's St. Patrick's Day programme will also serve as a platform to launch the Global Footprint initiative as announced by the Taoiseach in August 2017. St. Patrick's Day will likewise be an opportunity to reinforce key messages on Northern Ireland, Ireland's campaign to become a member of the UN Security Council in 2021-22 and the Irish economy. Finally, our travels will renew the bonds of friendship with the global Irish family at a time when their thoughts are very much on their home country.

Question No. 39 answered with Question No. 11.

UN Security Council

40. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of his Department's work in securing a seat for Ireland on the UN Security Council as a non-permanent member for the 2021 to 2022 term in view of Ireland's contribution to UN peacekeeping; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3563/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Ireland is seeking election to a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council in June 2020 for the 2021-2022 term. We are one of three candidates for the two seats available to members of the Western European and Others regional group at the United Nations. Canada and Norway are the other two candidates. In order to be elected to the Security Council, Ireland will need to secure the support of two-thirds of the UN membership – approximately 129 votes of the 193 Member States. The UN provides the foundation of an orderly, rules-based international system, which is essential for a small and globally trading country like Ireland. We have a responsibility to participate to the fullest extent possible in the work of the UN, and it is in our interests to do so. By advocating for its role and values we are promoting our own values and interests. The Security Council is the body which mandates peacekeeping missions and sets the policies that UN troops must follow in the field. Over 1,000 Irish men and women serve each year under UN mandated peace support operations, representing our people and our values. Membership of the Security Council would be a valuable opportunity for Ireland to influence decisions which will affect the conditions and circumstances under which the members of our Defence Forces are deployed.

Security Council membership would also give us an avenue to influence initiatives on conflict prevention, a priority area for Ireland, where we have called for increased investment and a stronger role for women in the maintenance of international peace and security.

Other policy areas of growing influence on international peace and security include migration, climate change, sustainable development and food security. Additionally, the link between youth, peace and security is increasingly recognised as an area of importance and one which the Security Council will need to address in a comprehensive way.

The campaign leading up to the 2020 election is already well under way. While the House will understand that I cannot provide specific information on bilateral contacts which are being made in relation to Ireland's candidature, I am using every opportunity to press the value of Ireland playing our role on the Council. In addition, my Department's diplomatic staff in Ireland, our Permanent Representation to the UN in New York, and our entire Embassy network have been actively presenting our case and seeking support.

Ireland's strong and sustained record of participation in UN peacekeeping operations is being emphasised as part of our campaign for election to the Security Council. Irish troops have been on duty for the UN since 1958, sixty years ago this year. We are Europe's largest

per capita contributor of troops to UN peacekeeping operations. Our peacekeepers have played a key role in enhancing Ireland's international reputation through their work for the UN. Our commitment to building peace, as a small island nation with our own troubled history, resonates with many UN member states. We understand the complexities of conflict, and seek to share our own lived experience of addressing it.

Ireland's previous terms on the Security Council have provided an opportunity to give firm practical expression to the principles underlying Irish foreign policy. These principles are widely held across the Oireachtas. A strong campaign will be required to secure election in 2020. Should we succeed, our election will allow Ireland to again bring our values of peace, justice and human rights to bear in directing the work of the Security Council.

Question No. 41 answered with Question No. 25.

Question No. 42 answered with Question No. 20.

Question No. 43 answered with Question No. 25.

Human Rights

44. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has formally raised the issue of Christian persecution at the UN and the EU Foreign Affairs Council; the actions being taken by his Department in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3687/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right, which is replicated in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, includes freedom to change one's religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest one's religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. Ireland strongly condemns all forms of persecution on the basis of religion or belief, irrespective of where they occur and who the victims are. Our commitment to promoting freedom of religion and belief is reaffirmed in the *Global Island: Ireland's Foreign Policy for a Changing World*, published in January 2015 and more recently in the Programme for Partnership Government. We work to advance this commitment at the EU, the UN Human Rights Council, the UN General Assembly and through our bilateral contacts. We regularly condemn acts of persecution based on religion or belief at the UN General Assembly, raising our concern for the continued discrimination, intimidation and systematic harassment of members of Muslim, Christian and Baha'i communities, as well as those belonging to non-traditional religious or belief movements.

Most recently, during the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief at UNGA in October 2017, Ireland welcomed the focus of the Special Rapporteur on gender-specific abuses against women and girls with regard to the right to freedom of religion or belief and stressed engagement with civil society actors, including existing regional and national human rights mechanisms, in carrying out the mandate.

Ireland also speaks on the rights of religious minorities at the Human Rights Council where we strongly condemn all forms of persecution and violence committed on the basis of religion or belief and call on all States to prevent such acts. In 2017, we expressed our concerns about the persecution of religious minorities in the Middle East region, Eritrea, Myanmar, Iran and the DPRK. We also avail of the Universal Periodic Review process to remind countries under review of their obligation to advance fundamental freedoms, including the right to freedom of

religion or belief, under international human rights law.

Ireland works within and alongside the EU to address the persecution of Christians and other religious minorities. During our Presidency of the European Council in 2013, Ireland played a key role in the development of the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief, which provide a framework for the promotion of this right in the EU's external human rights policy. In 2015, Ireland also pressed for the inclusion of a reference to the promotion of this right in the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2015-2019, which ensures that the EU will continue to engage on the issue of the promotion of freedom of religion and belief.

Ireland consistently supports EU-led resolutions on freedom of religion or belief, most recently at the 34th session of the Human Rights Council in March 2017 and the 72nd Session of UN General Assembly in November 2017.

Humanitarian Aid Provision

45. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he, together with his EU and UN colleagues, continues to co-ordinate efforts to address issues of war, starvation, deprivation and human rights abuse at the most severely affected locations globally; if international aid continues to get to its intended targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3672/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The scale of humanitarian crises globally continues to increase. The UN estimates that over 145 million people are now in need of urgent humanitarian assistance and protection, mainly as a result of conflict, but also natural disasters. \$24.7 billion is needed in 2018 to respond effectively to urgent humanitarian needs. Humanitarian crises are complex in nature, frequently resulting in significant displacement, food insecurity, rising malnutrition levels, and serious concerns for the protection of civilians. Such crises require a coordinated response from the international community and, to this end, Ireland engages closely with our UN, EU, Red Cross and other partners. In 2016, over 75% of our humanitarian funding was provided through the UN and EU, with a similar amount in 2017. This coordinated response better enables us to reach those in urgent need of assistance. In 2017, despite the huge gap between the total requirements of the UN-led appeals and funding received, the international community provided record levels of funding and their coordinated response reached tens of millions of people, more than ever before, saving millions of lives. Ireland is the eighth largest donor to the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) since it was established in 2012, enabling a rapid humanitarian response whenever and wherever crises hit. Ireland will take on a lead donor coordination role with UN OCHA in 2018, in addition to €2.9 million in core funding provided to support its coordination efforts.

Collectively, the EU and its member states are the world's leading donor of humanitarian aid. Through its EU budget contribution, Ireland provided over €25m to ECHO in 2016. Ireland will continue to prioritise funding for those with the greatest and most urgent need in 2018. The Irish Government will also continue to use every opportunity to advocate for the protection of and assistance to those in humanitarian crisis situations at both EU and UN fora.

Question No. 46 answered with Question No. 18.

Defence Forces Recruitment

47. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the minimum criteria for recruitment into the Army; the reason a person (details supplied) did not meet the minimum criteria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3741/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): Entry to the Permanent Defence Force is either through the Cadetship Competition, Apprenticeship Competition, General Service Enlistment, or Direct Entry Competitions, which are held to fill vacancies in specialist appointments. To apply for any of the above entry streams, applicants must meet all of the eligibility criteria, as laid down in Defence Forces Regulations, and/or the conditions governing a particular competition. These eligibility criteria cover residency conditions, minimum and maximum age requirements, minimum education qualification and security clearance. All applicants must also meet certain medical and physical standards, which include minimum vision, hearing and height standards. Any candidate who fails to meet all of the eligibility criteria will not be recruited into the Permanent Defence Force.

I am advised by the military authorities that the applicant in question did not meet all of the eligibility criteria as laid down.

I am unable to comment further on this matter as all applications for recruitment to the Permanent Defence Force are treated as strictly private and confidential.

Birth Certificates Provision

48. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for a foreign birth registration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3782/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The application for Foreign Births Registration is under active consideration. A determination will be made in the coming week and the applicant will receive a response thereafter.

Brexit Issues

49. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to the UK Secretary of State for the Exiting of the European Union's comments in December 2017 that the agreement between Ireland and the UK was a statement of intent and not legally enforceable, his views on these comments; and his further views on whether the commitments agreed to are legally enforceable. [3850/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I welcome the decision of the European Council on 15 December that sufficient progress had been made in phase 1 of the negotiations and that the negotiations can now move to phase 2, as well as the adoption of additional negotiating Guidelines on the same day. The decision by the European Council that sufficient progress had been achieved was taken on the basis of a recommendation from the EU's lead negotiator Michel Barnier. This recommendation was based on the principles and commitments set out in the Joint Report from the EU and UK negotiators on progress in phase one of the Brexit negotiations, published on 8 December 2017. This Joint Report details the important commitments made in Phase 1 on EU citizens' rights and on the financial settlement that must be agreed between the EU and the UK on the UK's departure. On the Irish-specific issues, the Government achieved the goals we set out to achieve in this phase. We have secured concrete commitments on the maintenance of the Common Travel Area, and

on the protection of the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts and the gains of the peace process. Crucially, we now have a written guarantee that a hard border, including any physical infrastructure and associated checks and controls, will be avoided and have commitments as to 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 proposed by the British Government, we have a firm back stop in the UK's commitment that it will maintain full alignment with those rules of the Customs Union and Single Market which support North South cooperation, the all-island economy and protect the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts. Moreover, such an arrangement must be compatible with the UK's guarantee of avoiding a hard border, which is an 'overarching requirement.'

The Joint Report agreed between the EU and UK is far more than a statement of intent – as the British Government accepts. It represents a set of very strong political commitments and guarantees. These must now be reflected in the Withdrawal Agreement which will be legally binding and must be concluded before the UK's departure from the EU on 29 March 2019. This work is now under way.

Moreover, the additional negotiating Guidelines adopted by the European Council on 15 December last make clear that negotiations in phase two can only progress as long as all commitments undertaken in the first phase of the negotiations are respected in full and translated into legal terms as quickly as possible through the elaboration of the formal Withdrawal Agreement, including with regard to the Irish-specific issues.

EU Bodies

50. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the way in which a person was selected as a nominee for appointment to the expert group set up by the director general of the European Commission's Directorate General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology to advise the European Commission on the spread of false information across traditional and social media; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3717/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): It is an internal matter for the European Commission as to how they set up the expert group which will advise the Commission on the spread of false information across traditional and social media. The Government was not involved in the selection process and was not asked to provide nominees. I am, however, pleased to welcome the appointment of two Irish members, Mr Noel Curran and Mr Stephen Rae, to this expert group. Neither individual is an Irish Government nominee, but I am confident that each will bring a wealth of valuable experience to their role and to this very topical and important issue.

Middle East Issues

51. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to progress the recognition of Palestine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3870/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): As stated previously, in this House and elsewhere, the Government is committed to recognising

the State of Palestine as part of a lasting settlement of the conflict. In all of my meetings during my recent visit to Israel and Palestine – with Israelis, Palestinians, and UN partners – I conveyed the importance the Irish people attach to the resolution of the Middle East Peace Process. Ireland, along with our EU partners, supports the achievement of a two state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that meets Israeli and Palestinian security needs and Palestinian aspirations for statehood and sovereignty, ends the occupation that began in 1967, and resolves all permanent status issues in order to end 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. There are many varied factors bearing on the question of recognition. 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.

Brexit Issues

52. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he expects the EU to continue to trade with the UK post Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3894/18]

59. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress to date in respect of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3907/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 52 and 59 together.

The additional Guidelines on the Article 50 negotiations adopted by the European Council on 15 December 2017 represented a very significant step in the Brexit negotiations. These Guidelines welcomed the joint progress report agreed between the European Commission Taskforce and the UK. On this basis, it was agreed that sufficient progress has been made in phase 1 of the negotiations and that the negotiations can move to phase 2.

Work during phase 2 of the negotiations will focus on three distinct areas: completing work on the withdrawal issues and on drafting the Withdrawal Agreement; transitional arrangements and; preparatory work for discussions on the future EU-UK relationship.

Ireland has clear policies and positions across all three of these areas and I will continue to articulate these at the General Affairs Council (Art. 50) as well as during my bilateral contacts with EU counterparts and with the EU Chief Negotiator, Michel Barnier, in the coming weeks and months. Through the Permanent Representation in Brussels, Irish officials are engaging on a daily basis with the Commission Taskforce and with the relevant Article 50 preparatory bodies. Their work is being informed and prepared by the cross-Governmental coordination structures convened by my Department.

As concerns the withdrawal issues, I welcome that the Guidelines agreed in December un-

derline that negotiations in phase two can only progress as long as all commitments undertaken regarding citizens' rights, the financial settlement and the Irish-specific issues during the first phase are respected in full and translated faithfully into legal terms as quickly as possible. A key focus in the coming weeks and months will therefore be on completing work on the withdrawal issues and on drafting the relevant parts of the Withdrawal Agreement.

It will also be important to maintain a clear focus on the unique challenges faced by Ireland and I welcome that all aspects of the Irish specific issues will continue to be worked on in a distinct stream of work in phase 2.

As concerns transitional arrangements, I welcome that these have been identified as an early priority in phase 2 and that the European Commission Taskforce proposed additional negotiating Directives on transitional arrangements on 20 December. These draft Directives, which propose a 'status-quo' transitional arrangement, are currently being discussed by the EU27 Member States with a view to their agreement at the General Affairs Council (Art. 50) on 29 January. Once these additional negotiating directives are agreed by the Council, the Commission will be in a position to begin negotiations with the UK on this issue.

In the Guidelines of 15 December, the European Council also invited the Commission and the Council to continue preparations for the negotiations on the framework for the EU-UK future relationship with a view to agreeing additional Guidelines at the European Council on 22-23 March 2018. In this regard, I welcome that the Guidelines reaffirm the EU's desire to establish a close partnership with the UK, including on trade. This is in line with Ireland's objective of having the closest possible relationship between the EU and the UK.

It is now important for the UK to provide further clarity on what it wants for the future relationship with the EU. The EU remains open to all options, in line with the principles agreed by the European Council. There is no doubt that the EU, including Ireland, will continue to trade with the UK after it leaves the Union. The scope of this trade and the conditions under which it will be conducted is subject to negotiations. It has been Ireland's consistent view that any EU-UK future relationship agreement should be comprehensive and ambitious and as wide as possible in its scope, avoiding any tariff barriers and minimising to the greatest extent possible any non-tariff barriers while ensuring a level playing field.

In the coming weeks and months, Ireland will continue to work closely with its EU partners and the European Commission Task Force, and with the UK, to ensure the commitments made in phase one are delivered in full and that Ireland's interests are advanced in the EU's position for the negotiations on transitional arrangements and the future relationship. In the course of these engagements, as has been the case to date, Ireland will continue to make proposals to seek to deliver on our objectives and priorities for the Brexit negotiations.

Diplomatic Representation

53. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which Irish diplomatic staff abroad are engaged with promoting trade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3895/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Advancing Ireland's trade, tourism, education and investment objectives through economic diplomacy and related activities is a high level goal of Ireland's foreign policy, informing and directing the work of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and our mission network. The Department's international network plays a crucial role in supporting Irish businesses to grow

overseas, in promoting our wider trade interests including through EU and WTO regulation; in addressing market access issues; in facilitating business visas; in promoting Ireland's visibility; in underpinning the work of our State agencies; and in supporting Ministerial visits and trade missions. Indeed the rationale of promoting trade was at the forefront of recent decisions to announce new Embassies in Wellington, Santiago, Jordan and Bogota as well as Consulates General in Mumbai and Vancouver.

In the evolving global economic and trading environment, and against the backdrop of Brexit, it is essential that our mission network is equipped to meet new challenges and exploit new opportunities for Irish trade. In recognition of this, and under the new economic diplomacy initiative launched in January 2016, my Department has implemented a number of initiatives. We have put in a place a new and more flexible funding arrangements with a system of Promotion and Outreach Budgets for the mission network. This Three Tiered Funding is designed to enhance the capacity of missions and regional groups to act more autonomously and catalytically in support of our High Level Goals, including of course Prosperity. This new system will greatly assist the mission network in support of the objectives of the Global Footprint initiative.

To further augment the economic work of my Department and our Embassy network, locally-hired Commercial Attachés have been appointed, on a pilot basis, in our embassies in Mexico, Brasilia, Buenos Aires, Bucharest, and Jakarta and consideration is being given to the potential for similar appointments in other locations in the future. In addition to this, three Economic Development Officers (EDO) have been appointed in Nairobi, Hanoi and Abuja, funded from the Irish Aid budget. There are also two officers funded from the Joint Economic Council (JEC) Project Fund in Moscow and Beijing, whose role is analogous to that of a Commercial Attaché.

It is increasingly important that our work both at HQ and abroad is strategically focused and closely coordinated as a whole-of-government exercise. The framework for this is the Team Ireland approach. The actions required to achieve our trade, tourism and investment targets are set out in *Ireland Connected: Trading and Investing in a Dynamic World*, published in March last year.

Moreover, my Department, in cooperation with the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, organized the Team Ireland Conference last November. The Conference addressed key issues and how to improve Team Ireland, particularly in relation to best practice and improving our strategic approach at an operational level.

All efforts by Embassies and Local Market Teams abroad to take advantage of new opportunities for Irish business in key markets will continue to be guided here at home by the work of the Trade Division within my Department and by the Export Trade Council, which I chair.

EU Issues

54. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the EU continues to foster good relations with Georgia and Ukraine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3896/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The EU continues to foster good relations with Ukraine and Georgia. Both countries are active participants in the EU's Eastern Partnership Initiative which provides a framework for cooperation with the six countries of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus region. The EU has ratified Association Agreements with Georgia and Ukraine which aim to promote political association

and economic integration with the Union based on shared values. The fifth Eastern Partnership Summit on 24 November 2017 adopted a roadmap setting out future priorities for the initiative, entitled “Eastern Partnership - 20 Deliverables for 2020”. A range of short and long-term milestones including improving connectivity, energy efficiency, support to SMEs, engaging with youth and a broadened outreach to civil society are identified. The EU remains fully committed to assisting Ukraine in delivering its political and economic reform programme and has provided unprecedented levels of support to underpin the Government’s efforts. This support includes loans, budget support, humanitarian aid, technical assistance and trade preferences. In addition, the EU is playing a key role in helping to reform the civilian security sector through its Advisory Mission to Ukraine.

1 September 2017 marked an important milestone in relations with Ukraine when the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement legally entered into force. The fully ratified Agreement will allow the EU to further strengthen political and economic ties with Ukraine. The provisional application of the Agreement since 2016 has seen a welcome increase in two way trade. This trend continued in the first eight months of 2017, with an increase of about 27% percent compared with the same period the previous year.

The EU-Ukraine Association Council held its fourth meeting on 8 December 2017. The EU welcomed progress in the implementation of Ukraine’s ambitious reform programme, while underlining the need to step up reform efforts. The Council reaffirmed the EU’s commitment to political association and economic integration based on common values of democracy, rule of law and human rights.

As regards the conflict in eastern Ukraine, the EU continues to fully support ongoing efforts to secure implementation of the Minsk peace agreements within the framework of the OSCE Trilateral Contact Group (OSCE, Russia and Ukraine) and the Normandy Format (France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine). The Minsk accords offer the only basis for a political resolution to the conflict and the European Union will continue to push for their full implementation.

As with Ukraine, the EU remains committed to its political association and economic integration with Georgia and the successful implementation of the Association Agreement, including its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. The EU has praised Georgia’s reform efforts while underlining the need to ensure sustainability of the changes which have already taken place. The revised EU-Georgia Association Agenda provides a practical framework and guidance for the implementation of priorities for joint work until 2020, based on the Association Agreement. Justice sector reform is one of the key priorities. The EU also fully supports Georgia’s territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. The appointment in November 2017 of a new EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia, as well as the EU Monitoring Mission are visible and substantial signs of the EU’s commitment to helping Georgia address its security challenges.

Middle East Issues

55. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the degree to which the EU continues to maintain a positive influence in the Middle East with particular reference to the Israeli Palestine peace process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3897/18]

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. During my recent working visit to Israel and Palestine, I met with both President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu, as well as other representatives of the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and discussed with them reinvigorating the effort towards peace in the Middle East. In these meetings, I expressed Ireland's and the EU's willingness to support US efforts to re-launch negotiations. It is, of course, important that any parameters which are advanced actually provide a basis on which both parties could agree, and for this reason the EU has long been committed to a two-state solution, using 1967 borders as a basis, and with Jerusalem as a capital for both states.

In discussions on the Middle East Peace Process with my EU colleagues, most recently at the Foreign Affairs Council on Monday, I have supported continuing EU efforts to encourage an appropriate US initiative. I also believe that the EU must continue our own work, including work on the ground to help preserve and create the political and physical space for a two state solution, and to alleviate the impact of the occupation on ordinary Palestinians, particularly in Gaza. I am actively exploring with EU colleagues how this can best be done.

During an informal lunch with President Abbas after the Council, my colleagues and I reiterated the EU's unified position on the need to preserve a two-state solution, and the status of Jerusalem as future capital of two states.

Human Rights

56. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the international community is dealing with the situation in the Horn of Africa with particular reference to the alleviation of famine, violence and human rights issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3904/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): 2017 saw a year of unprecedented humanitarian crises, including the reoccurrence of the threat of famine to the Horn of Africa, including South Sudan and Somalia. Ireland, in particular through EU and UN structures, continues to support efforts to address issues of famine, violence and human rights issues around the globe, including in the Horn of Africa. The scale of the humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa is very acute. Conflict, drought, severe food insecurity and now famine, are causing massive population displacements and suffering throughout the region. Drought continues to worsen across the region. Almost 30 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, with over 24 million people facing varying levels of food insecurity.

Ireland continues to prioritize this region in its humanitarian response. Ireland, through the Irish Aid programme, has provided over €132 million in humanitarian assistance in the Horn of Africa region since 2012, including €28 million in 2017. Following his visit to the Horn of Africa in November, the Tánaiste briefed EU colleagues at the EU Foreign Affairs Council, on the critical humanitarian situation, and emphasised the importance of deepening the EU's political engagement with Africa in the future.

A priority for Ireland in responding to humanitarian crises, is ensuring that life-saving assistance reaches those most in need, as quickly as possible. Ireland supports the role of OCHA in coordinating the response to humanitarian crises, and provides them with core funding (€2.9 million in 2017) to facilitate their operation. Ireland also supports the UN Central Emergency

Response Fund (CERF) which delivers funding quickly to humanitarian responders, including underfunded crises, aiming to ensure that competing demands do not mean crises are forgotten. In 2017, Ireland provided €22 million to CERF making us the sixth largest donor that year. This UN managed fund has already contributed US\$118 million to the region last year- almost 30% of the overall CERF 2017 allocation.

Ireland remains committed to providing humanitarian assistance where it is needed most, working with partners who can ensure that such assistance is delivered in a coordinated and effective manner. However, we also recognise that humanitarian aid alone is not the answer. We will continue to focus our efforts on supporting the international system to find peaceful resolution to conflicts that are currently driving humanitarian need.

Multilateral Development Banks

57. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the multilateral aid programme continues to reach those for whom it was intended; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3905/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The Government is strongly committed to delivering Ireland's Official Development Assistance (ODA) programme in the most effective way, providing humanitarian assistance and contributing to the fight against global poverty and hunger, including through working with multilateral partners. Funding for multilateral organisations is kept under regular review by my Department, to ensure that it is targeted and provided to partners which can contribute most effectively to delivering the priorities of our foreign policy and our international development policy, as set out in the *Global Island* and in *One World, One Future*. In this way, we are playing a strong role in supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

In total, Ireland contributed €443.35 million to multilateral organisations in 2016. This was mainly channelled through: the European Union development cooperation and humanitarian programmes, for example the European Development Fund (EDF); the United Nations in the form of either core funding for UN agencies, or specific programmatic support, for example with UNICEF; and the multilateral development banks such as the World Bank - all important contributors to social and economic development, peace and security, and human rights.

Throughout, the ability of these multilateral channels to reach the poorest and most fragile countries and regions in the world, and deliver real results on the ground, is at the forefront of Ireland's financing and engagement.

Programmes considered for funding assistance are rigorously appraised using clear criteria, including efficiency in the use of resources, cost effectiveness, accountability, and sustainability of intended impact. Programmes in receipt of funding are subject to regular internal and external monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the intended objectives and goals are being achieved - for example using the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) evaluations which every year focus on a number of multilateral organisations.

Ireland also plays a strong role in the relevant management structures of our multilateral partners, for example as Board Members of UNDP and UNFPA this year. In addition, we use our Embassy network, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, to monitor the work of our multilateral partners on the ground and ensure that aid reaches the targeted population.

The review of Ireland's development cooperation programme, to culminate in a new White

Paper later this year, provides an opportunity to further elaborate on our engagement with multilateral partners, and a new multilateral strategy will be finalised later this year to follow through on that.

Overseas Development Aid

58. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the bilateral aid programme continues to make progress in the context of delivering aid effectively and efficiently to those it was intended; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3906/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The Government is strongly committed to Ireland's overseas aid programme and to its place at the heart of our foreign policy. Detailed planning leading to a results-based approach characterizes Ireland's bilateral aid programmes. This enables the quality, effectiveness and efficiency to be kept under regular review by the Department. The Embassy network, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, plays a key role in the planning, management and oversight of Ireland's bilateral partners on the ground, frequently augmented by the insights received from other countries' Embassies regarding their interaction with the same partners. In addition to reporting against results, Ireland's development cooperation programmes are subject to regular monitoring and are frequently evaluated, both by the independent internal evaluation section of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and also, as required, by external evaluators. The combination of ongoing qualitative and quantitative oversight helps ensure that Irish bilateral development assistance remains well targeted, contributing as effectively and efficiently as possible to the priorities of Ireland's foreign and international development policies.

I witnessed first-hand the impact of Ireland's bilateral and multilateral support during my recent visits to Tanzania and South Africa. I met with refugees who had fled conflict in Burundi and were hosted in a camp in western Tanzania managed by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). I saw how Irish assistance was making a difference to their lives, in particular through the provision of water and education. I also saw how Irish bilateral assistance was impacting positively on lives across the country, through targeted and effective interventions in the health system and in building a social safety net for the most vulnerable, in particularly women and girls at risk of violence.

Irish assistance goes beyond money: I met, for example, a doctor in rural Tanzania who had trained in Ireland as an Irish Aid Fellow and who on his return home was sharing the knowledge and experiences gained here. Ireland's work in the digital education space, in particular Africa Code Week, which I launched during my visit to Tanzania, reaches over 1.5 million people in Africa each year.

The impact of Irish development assistance is reported on annually. As demonstrated in the 2016 Irish Aid Annual report, bilateral ODA currently represents 53% of Ireland's total ODA. This funding is making a difference in alleviating the suffering caused by humanitarian crises and hunger, and supporting improvements in access to health, education, agriculture and social protection services for some of the world's most vulnerable people. Ireland complements bilateral assistance through support for the multilateral system, allowing knowledge gained in bilateral contexts to inform and influence the international response, especially through the European Union and United Nations.

Ireland's development cooperation has a very strong reputation internationally for delivering results, consistently performing well in OECD-DAC peer reviews, which take place every

5 years.

The most recent such review, in 2014, found Ireland to be one the best performing donors in responding to the world's neediest countries. That report demonstrated that in 2012, for example, 0.24% of Ireland's gross national income was as part of Ireland's assistance to Least Developed Countries (LDCs). This exceeds the UN target of 0.15%, and outperforms many other donors. This focus on the most needy has continued, with the 2016 OECD DAC Development Cooperation Report ranking Ireland highest among DAC members for the share of bilateral ODA allocated to least developed countries.

My Department is committed to the continued strengthening of our planning, monitoring and oversight mechanisms to ensure that Irish development assistance continues to effectively and efficiently deliver results, in particular the alleviation of poverty.

Question No. 59 answered with Question No. 52.

EU Membership

60. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which candidate countries seeking to join the EU continue to adhere to the *acquis communautaire*; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3908/18]

62. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the EU continues to support and encourage democracy in the western Balkans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3910/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 60 and 62 together.

Ireland is a strong supporter of the EU's policy on enlargement. It is a key driver for stability, security and prosperity in the Western Balkans. We believe that aspirant countries must be judged on the principle of 'own merits' and that those wishing to join the Union must give the rule of law, justice and fundamental rights the utmost priority in terms of reform.

Countries wishing to become Member States of the European Union must comply with the *acquis communautaire*. The *acquis* is the body of common rights and obligations that is binding on all the EU member states. It is constantly evolving and comprises:

the content, principles and political objectives of the Treaties;

legislation adopted pursuant to the Treaties and the case law of the Court of Justice;

declarations and resolutions adopted by the Union;

instruments under the Common Foreign and Security Policy;

international agreements concluded by the Union and those entered into by the member states among themselves within the sphere of the Union's activities.

Candidate countries have to accept the *acquis* before they can join the EU and make EU law part of their own national legislation. Adoption and implementation of the *acquis* are the basis of the accession negotiations.

When a candidate moves into formal membership negotiations, the process involves the adoption of established EU law, preparations to be in a position to properly apply and enforce

it and implementation of judicial, administrative, economic and other reforms necessary for the country to meet the conditions for joining, known as the accession criteria.

When the negotiations and accompanying reforms have been completed to the satisfaction of both sides, the country can then join the EU.

There are currently three countries with which the EU has opened formal negotiations: Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey.

Thirty chapters (out of a total of 35) have been opened with Montenegro of which three chapters have already been provisionally closed.

Twelve of the 35 chapters have been opened with Serbia and two of these have been provisionally closed.

Sixteen chapters have been opened with Turkey and one is provisionally closed.

With respect to the EU's support for democracy in the Western Balkans, this is covered by Chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) and Chapter 24 (Justice, Freedom and Security). Both of these chapters have been opened with Serbia and Montenegro but have not been provisionally closed yet.

The EU promotes democratic values in all of its engagement with the Western Balkans, including through the provision of pre-accession funding, by facilitating the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and in its intense engagement with the candidate countries which have a 'European Perspective' but which have not yet opened formal negotiations, namely Albania and Macedonia, as well as the potential candidate countries of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo.

The European Commission is due to present its Strategy for the Western Balkan Countries in early February 2018 and is scheduled to publish country reports in April. These reports will assess the 'state of play' in individual candidate countries.

EU Issues

61. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which all member states in the EU continue to adhere to EU rules; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3909/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Member States have the primary responsibility for the correct transposition, application and implementation of EU law. This effective application of EU law is essential to ensure that citizens and businesses enjoy the benefits and meet the obligations established by EU law. The European Commission is responsible for ensuring that EU law is complied with. If the European Commission considers that a Member State is not applying EU law correctly, certain remedies are available if informal dialogue is not successful, including the opening of an infringement action by the Commission against the Member State concerned. If a resolution is ultimately not found through this process, the matter may be referred to the Court of Justice of the European Union for decision. While in a Union of 28 members there will at any one time always be several cases at various stages of the process, on the whole I am satisfied that Union law is respected. Separately, the Treaty on European Union sets out in Article 2 the fundamental values of the Union. Under Article 7, procedures exist for action against a Member State believed to be at serious risk of, or in, breach of those values. Those procedures have so far never been invoked. The General Affairs Council has responsibility for these issues. The next debate in the Council

on the theme of the rule of law is next month.

Question No. 62 answered with Question No. 60.

Overseas Development Aid Provision

63. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the countries to which Ireland contributes by way of development aid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3911/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): The Government is strongly committed to Ireland's overseas aid programme, and to its place at the heart of our foreign policy. Our priorities are clearly laid out in the Government's development policy, 'One World One Future'. In line with our commitment to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, our aid programme is sharply focused on delivering our goals of reducing poverty and hunger, promoting inclusive and sustainable growth and building more equitable and better systems of governance. My Department provides development assistance to over eighty of the world's least developed countries, supporting their development needs and responding to emergencies and protracted crises with humanitarian assistance. Sub-Saharan Africa is our priority region, where we direct assistance to the poorest communities, delivering real and sustainable improvements to the lives of some of the world's poorest and most vulnerable people in the areas of basic health, education, agriculture, and food production.

We focus in particular on a small number of key bilateral countries where we have a resident embassy and a team of development specialists and advisors who manage and oversee those country aid programmes. Our engagement with our partner countries is at a strategic level, and we provide support for their long-term development. These countries are Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Vietnam. Smaller more focused programs are delivered in countries and territories such as Zimbabwe, South Africa, Liberia, Kenya and Palestine.

Ireland's aid programme is delivered through a wide range of partners and channels, including partner government systems, Irish and international Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and missionary organisations, and UN and other multilateral agencies and organisations. We engage with UN and multilateral agencies whose core mission and objectives are closely aligned to Ireland's aid priorities, allowing us to work with and support vulnerable communities across most developing countries.

My Department reports annually on its development activities through the Irish Aid Annual Report, the most recent of which is for 2016 and the table below sets out the top thirty countries in receipt of bilateral assistance. This is not an exhaustive list as funding is also made to a number of countries through multilaterals sources.

The full Irish Aid Annual Report for 2016 is available through this link: www.irishaid.ie/news-publications/publications/publicationsarchive/2017/september/irish-aid-annual-report-2016/.

Top 30 Recipient Countries of Ireland's Bilateral ODA 2016**

	Recipient Country	€000's
1	Ethiopia	35,476

	Recipient Country	€000's
2	Mozambique	27,275
3	Tanzania	25,472
4	Uganda	24,056
5	Malawi	19,528
6	Viet Nam	14,473
7	Zambia	11,298
8	Sierra Leone	10,773
9	Syria	9,521
10	South Sudan	9,244
11	Kenya	7,275
12	Somalia	6,485
13	Democratic Republic of the Congo	6,444
14	Zimbabwe	6,300
15	Central African Republic	6,062
16	Turkey	5,621
17	Sudan	5,472
18	South Africa	5,466
19	Occupied Palestinian Territory	5,087
20	Yemen	4,000
21	Liberia	3,358
22	Nigeria	3,229
23	Niger	3,095
24	Lebanon	3,017
25	Haiti	2,833
26	Iraq	2,750
27	Afghanistan	2,368
28	Rwanda	1,866
29	Jordan	1,714
30	Burundi	1,638

**This annex gives a breakdown of aid by the country to which it was allocated. In the case of countries with major humanitarian crises, it should be noted that funding may be allocated to neighbouring countries or on a non-country specific basis.

Common Security and Defence Policy

64. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the activities of Boko Haram continue to be restricted throughout Africa; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3912/18]

65. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the continued action taken by the international community to curb the activities of Al-Shabaab; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3913/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I propose to take Questions Nos. 64 and 65 together.

I remain deeply concerned by the peace and security threat posed by Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram, and by the consequent humanitarian crises across East and West Africa. In Somalia, the security situation remains extremely fragile. Al-Shabaab continue to launch attacks on govern-

ment facilities and civilians. They remain a core threat to peace and stability in the country. In the Lake Chad region, regional armed forces have made progress in containing Boko Haram but the group continue to represent a serious transboundary threat to peace, stability, and prosperity, with millions of people affected by violence and displacement.

Ireland and the EU remain firm supporters of peace and stability in Somalia and the Lake Chad region. The EU continues to provide considerable funding to AMISOM, the African Union-led peacekeeping mission in Somalia, to reduce the serious threat posed by Al-Shabaab. The EU provides further support, as part of its Common Security and Defence Policy, to capacity building operations in the areas of maritime law enforcement and military training in order to strengthen rule of law in Somalia and boost the Somali security forces' ability to combat the ongoing insurgency. The EU has pledged up to €50 million in support of the 8,000 strong Multinational Joint Taskforce drawn from Nigeria and other West African countries, active against Boko Haram.

Ireland supports the comprehensive approach being taken at EU and UN level to prevent and counter terrorism. We have stressed the need to address the underlying factors that contribute to radicalisation and terrorism. Ireland sees an important link between peace, security and development, and this informs not just Ireland's development cooperation approach but our broader foreign policy.

The combined effects of the insurgencies of Al Shabaab and Boko Haram have contributed to severe humanitarian crises and mass displacement in Somalia and the Lake Chad region. Ireland continues to provide life-saving humanitarian assistance to address these crises. Ireland provided €6 million worth of assistance to Somalia in 2017, with plans to contribute to the Somalia Humanitarian Fund in the coming weeks. Ireland provided €5.2 million to Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region in 2017 and I expect that we will provide a similar level of support in 2018.

Our Embassies in Abuja and Nairobi continue to closely monitor developments in relation to Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram, and to work with the relevant Governments, regional authorities, and other key partners to support peace and stability in both regions, and to address the humanitarian crises through diplomatic engagement and humanitarian funding.

Human Rights

66. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the most serious incidences of genocide reported in the past year; the action taken at EU and UN level to combat the problem; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3914/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Article II of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, to which Ireland has acceded, defines genocide as any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- a. Killing members of the group;
- b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

A similar definition of genocide is contained in Article 6 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Since the term “genocide” is a term which has a particular meaning under international law, recognition of events definitively as genocide involves a complex analysis of both facts and law.

My Department tracks situations throughout the world which may give rise to mass atrocities, including genocide, and regularly intervenes to raise its concerns at a bilateral level and in international forums including the European Union, the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly.

In 2015, Ireland co-sponsored UN General Assembly Resolution 69/323 which designated 9 December as the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of This Crime.

The EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2015 – 2019 reaffirms the European Union’s commitment to promote and protect human rights and to support democracy worldwide. Within this plan, the EU, through the EEAS, Commission and Member States, commits to enhance co-operation with and support for the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the UN Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, as well as other international and regional actors and civil society organisations engaged in preventive action.

Vehicle Registration

67. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Finance when a reply will issue to correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3699/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): A response to this correspondence issued from my office on 12/12/2017.

Motor homes are classed as Category B vehicles and therefore are subject to a rate of VRT of 13.3% of their Open Market Selling Price (OMSP). This compares to Category A (passenger) vehicles which are charged at rates between 14% and 36% of their OMSP depending on the level of CO2 they emit. Motor homes also receive preferential treatment vis-à-vis Category A vehicles in relation to the application of annual motor tax.

There are a number of objectives of the Irish Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) system. VRT is an important source of revenue for the State. It also seeks to reflect the negative externalities caused by using the vehicle in the State. These externalities are the costs to society and to the environment that, without the tax, would not otherwise be reflected in the price of the vehicle and for which the consumer would not otherwise have to pay.

In the case of motor vehicles, these include environment externalities such as air pollution, which is why one of the bases for imposing VRT is the vehicle’s carbon emissions. Other externalities which VRT seeks to reflect, include the costs to society of providing and maintaining the road infrastructure, traffic control, relevant emergency services, and vehicle registration and licensing. The funds raised through VRT go towards compensating the Irish State for these significant costs.

Motor Insurance Costs

68. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the number of complaints arising over older cars in full working condition that have successfully passed the NCT and that have high safety specification being quoted more expensively than newer cars; if he has satisfied himself with same; if he has sought an explanation from the companies regarding same; the effect an extra year has on price; and if it is differentiated on the basis of the specifications of the model in a given age bracket. [3742/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's first point, I can inform him that my attention has been drawn to complaints in relation to the provision and pricing of motor insurance for older vehicles. My officials have received representations on this topic, while there have also been a number of Parliamentary Questions tabled on the matter.

As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I nor the Central Bank of Ireland can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. Consequently, I am not in a position to direct insurance companies as to the pricing level or terms or conditions that they should apply in respect of particular categories of drivers or vehicles.

Policy in relation to the NCT lies with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport. The NCT was introduced to comply with an EU Roadworthiness Testing Directive aimed at improving road safety and environmental protection. While the NCT is one component of having safer vehicles on our roads, every vehicle owner has a personal and legal responsibility to ensure that their vehicles are roadworthy and well maintained. The NCT is an inspection or general "health check" of what is visible and accessible on the day of the test and includes a check of the roadworthiness of such safety features, amongst others, as lighting, brakes and tyres.

The NCT is a minimum requirement of roadworthiness and is therefore not the only rating factor taken into account in the provision of motor insurance. Insurers will generally require that a car has a valid NCT in order to be covered. However, in making their individual decisions on whether to offer cover and what terms to apply, they will also use a combination of other rating factors, which include the age and type of the vehicle, as well as the age of the driver, the relevant claims record and driving experience, the number of drivers, how the car is used, etc. My understanding is that insurers do not all use the same combination of rating factors, and as a result prices and availability of cover varies across the market. In addition, insurance companies will price in accordance with their own past claims experience, meaning that in relation to the age of a vehicle and the availability of cover, different insurance companies will use different age thresholds.

Finally, it may be of interest to the Deputy that the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission website has an informative section regarding the purchase of car insurance, and one of the key tips listed to help cut costs is to "shop around" and to "always get quotes from several insurance providers when you need to get or renew insurance". The relevant website address is: <https://www.ccpc.ie/consumers/money/insurance/car-insurance/>.

VAT Registration

69. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to reform the preferential treatment of farmers in regard to VAT. [3746/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that in accordance with the EU VAT Directive farmers may register for VAT or be treated as flat-rate farmers for VAT purposes.

The flat rate scheme is designed to compensate non-VAT registered farmers for the VAT incurred by them on the purchases of goods and services relating to their activities. The scheme sets out a percentage amount (currently 5.4%), known as the flat-rate addition, which unregistered farmers apply to their prices when selling to VAT-registered businesses (co-operatives, meat factories, etc). The VAT-registered business treats the flat-rate amount as a normal business input in its periodic VAT return, claiming input credit for the flat-rate amount paid to the flat-rate farmer. In this way, farmers are compensated for the VAT borne by them on their input costs, and this simplification reduces the administrative burden for them as there is no need to register for VAT to recover VAT borne on their inputs. Under the EU VAT directive, the flat-rate addition is calculated using macro-economic statistics for the preceding three years. Member States are not allowed to fix a rate independently.

I have no plans to reform the current system.

Motor Insurance

70. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance when the remaining claimants in relation to a company (details supplied) will be compensated; the way in which the State is protecting customers of the company from personal liability; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3747/18]

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

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.

The liquidator for Setanta Insurance has informed me that as of 31 December 2017, there are 1,577 active claims, of these 573 claimants have been paid compensation from the ICF subject to the 65%/€825,000 limits.

No date has been fixed for the next payment from the ICF, but the Liquidator has informed me that preparatory work is underway in respect of some 275 claims to the value of c €5.8m, with a view to the Accountant to the High Court making an application before the end of March. It is important to note that only claims which have been settled can be included in applications to the High Court for payment from the ICF. The process of settling claims is still ongoing and is subject in some cases to complex negotiations between all relevant parties.

In relation to the issue of policyholder liability, I am advised that there are still ongoing disputes around liability between policyholders and third party claimants, and in some instances, there may be more than one claim against a single policyholder. As this is a matter for third party claimants to make a decision on, the Government has no direct role in this process.

The policyholder liability issue is directly related to the shortfall anticipated by claimants. In relation to any Government intervention to fully compensate third party claimants over and above the 65% limit, and then “step into the shoes” of these claimants to recover directly

any balance due from the Setanta liquidation, there is a legal concern that this could result in the Government having a lower status in the creditor hierarchy, and thus significantly reduce the amount it could recoup from the liquidator.

In this respect, my Department sought and received advice from a Maltese law firm on this matter. This advice has been reviewed by the Office of the Attorney General. In addition, my Department has recently met with the Liquidator to receive an update on the status of the liquidation process as well as the issues he is encountering in settling claims. Based on this up to date information and the legal advice, the various courses of action open to the Government in relation to this issue are actively being considered.

Departmental Meetings

71. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the dates of all meetings held by his Department with a company (details supplied) in 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3761/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The information requested is being compiled and will be forwarded to the Deputy in line with Standing Orders.

Credit Unions

72. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance the changes to criteria for penny bank saving funds in banks and credit unions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3789/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I can advise the Deputy that there are no specific legislative or regulatory requirements relating to penny bank saving clubs (also commonly referred to as savings clubs.) Any such group savings scheme with a credit union would be required to comply with the same regulatory requirements that apply to an individual member's savings account with a credit union.

Section 27 of the Credit Union Act, 1997 sets out provisions in relation to the 'raising of funds by shares and deposits'. Section 27A of the Credit Union Act, 1997, requires that 'a credit union shall maintain appropriate oversight, policies, procedures, processes, practices, systems, controls, skills, expertise and reporting arrangements to ensure the protection of members' savings and that it complies with requirements imposed under the financial services legislation'

Under the Credit Union Act 1997 (Regulatory Requirements) Regulations 2016 (2016 Regulations) no individual member in a credit union shall have total savings which exceeds €100,000. Under the 2016 Regulations there are a number of credit unions who have been granted approval by the Central Bank to retain individual members' savings in excess of €100,000 which were held at commencement of the Regulations and a smaller number of credit unions have been granted approval to increase individual members' savings in excess of €100,000.

Credit unions must also ensure that they are compliant with the customer due diligence requirements of the *Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) Act 2010 (the 2010 Act)*. Section 33 of the 2010 Act requires that appropriate customer due diligence is undertaken to ensure that an entity has a means to identify and verify the identity of its customers.

The 2010 Act would therefore require that the identity of all savers in a savings club is known with appropriate customer due diligence undertaken by the credit union.

European Central Bank

73. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the input his Department or the Central Bank has had in the ECB's work on supervisory response on the treatment of non-performing split mortgages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3790/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): By way background, I can confirm for the Deputy that the Department was actively involved in the Subgroup on Non-Performing Loans (NPLs) of the European Council's Financial Services Committee (FSC). Arising from the work of this sub-group, an Action Plan was agreed to help reduce the stock of NPLs in European banks and their future emergence. The representation of the Department on the sub-group, and the more recent European Commission Expert Group on NPLs, ensures Ireland's views were voiced and considered in matters that were important for us.

On 18th January 2018 the European Commission issued the first progress report on the FSC Action Plan for the reduction of non-performing loans in Europe. In the case of Ireland, the report highlighted the significant progress made with NPLs which were down over 60% (EUR 50 billion) from peak in 2013. The report also highlighted that of the remaining EUR 34 billion at September 2017, approximately 65% are mortgages and approximately 45% of these mortgages have been restructured. The report further comments, however, that many of these mortgages will not meet the test to return to performing status despite regular cash flows.

In relation to split mortgages specifically, officials in the Department have been in dialogue with the regulatory authorities to understand the regulatory assessment of certain restructured mortgages. This includes some, but not all, split mortgages and certain other restructured mortgages, which are considered NPLs under EBA definitions for the remaining life of the mortgage even if such loans are performing to the restructure.

I have also been informed that in a recent letter from the head of the SSM to a member of the European Parliament, the SSM indicated that it has been "approached by several institutions from different euro area countries asking for supervisory guidance on the appropriate use of non-performing mortgage splitting". The SSM has started work on a response to these queries and is currently conducting a full legal and technical review of the topic. The Irish Central Bank is providing input into the SSM's review of the topic but this process has yet to be completed.

Primary Medical Certificates Applications

74. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance if the circumstances involved in a primary medical certificate application by a person (details supplied) will be investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3851/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the person concerned, who was a first time applicant, was deemed by them not to have qualified for the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme and as such was not eligible to access the benefits of the scheme. I am further advised that Revenue informed the family member of the person who submitted the application of this fact.

Office of Public Works Properties

75. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the agreement in place with his Department and Louth County Council regarding the use of a site

(details supplied); the number of his Department's staff that were issued with free car parking permits; the timeframe on this agreement; when it commenced; when it is due to cease; if there are financial benefits to the local authority throughout the period of this agreement; and if so, the amounts agreed. [3740/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Office of Public Works (OPW) owns the site known as Murdock's Carpark which incorporates Westgate House and the remains of the old town wall.

For the past number of years a portion of land to the rear of Westgate House and in front of the Garda Station has been managed, by agreement, by Louth County Council (LCC) for the purpose of a public car park. All charges in relation to this car park are managed by LCC. As part of the agreement, An Garda Síochána may use this car park for overflow parking.

I have been advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that they are currently engaging with LCC in relation to the future use of this site

Departmental Funding

76. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of funding invested in an institute (details supplied) for 2018. [3766/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Institute referred to by the Deputy is a body corporate established under the Institute for Advanced Studies Act, 1940. The Institute, through its three constituent schools, pursues fundamental research in specialised branches of knowledge and trains advanced students in methods of original research. The Institute is an academic publisher of monographs, books and journals in Celtic Studies and on advanced scientific subjects.

The Institute awards scholarships to a number of students and also accommodates students from the Universities and externally funded research bodies.

The allocation for the Institute amounts to €6.73m in 2018.

Schools Site Acquisitions

77. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the new site for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3703/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, the project to which he refers was announced as part of my Department's Six Year Capital Programme in 2015.

Officials in my Department continue to work closely with officials from the relevant local authority under the Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the acquisition of a suitable permanent location for the school to which the Deputy refers and with the assistance of Council officials a shortlist of technically suitable site options was identified.

Engagement with the relevant landowners is ongoing with a view to reaching agreement in principle on the most suitable site acquisition as soon as possible. The school patron will be appraised of developments in this respect and will be informed of the proposed permanent school location as soon as it is possible to do so.

I can assure the Deputy that the acquisition of a suitable site for the school is very active on the programme of site acquisitions and every effort is being made to secure the suitable site for the school as expeditiously as possible.

Schools Building Projects Administration

78. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the proposal to build housing units at the site formally occupied by a school (details supplied); the extent of discussions with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government; the date of the most recent inter-departmental contact on this matter; when these negotiations are expected to conclude; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3733/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is working closely with Meath County Council to progress the proposal to facilitate housing units on the site adjacent to the school site referred to by the Deputy. There has been ongoing positive and constructive engagement between senior officials in my Department and Meath County Council in that regard.

Arising from recent discussions on the matter, my Department received a proposal from the Department of Housing Planning and Local Government on January 22nd and this is currently under consideration.

Emergency Works Scheme Applications

79. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a grant application by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3796/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to inform that Deputy that the school in question was recently approved a grant under my Department's Emergency Works Grant Scheme to carry out the works to which she refers.

The school has been informed of my Department's decision.

School Closures

80. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the engagement his Department has had with the patron of a school (details supplied) regarding the future provision of primary education in the school in view of the pressure on spaces in other adjoining primary schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3808/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is continuing to engage with the Patron of the school in question in relation to issues arising, including the school's future viability.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that the decision making authority for a school closure belongs to the Patron of a school, and this is subject to the agreement of the Department. Any proposal to close a school must involve consultation with all of the relevant stakeholders, parents, teachers, students and local communities and follow decisions taken at local level.

The Patron of the school concerned has not advised my Department of any decision to close the school.

Schools Building Projects

81. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of building projects that were interrupted in 2017 by firms going into liquidation. [3810/18]

82. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of times his Department had to retender building projects as a result of firms going into liquidation. [3811/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 81 and 82 together.

In the past five years, my Department has not had to terminate or retender any school building projects arising from liquidation events.

Schools Building Projects

83. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position with regard to contractual disputes and outstanding building defects at schools (details supplied). [3812/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): There are no contractual disputes on the project to which the Deputy refers. The main contractor is dealing with a defect with the roofing installation. An independent review of the roof has been undertaken by an established UK roofing expert and a separate investigation has been undertaken by an expert appointed by the contractor's insurers. The findings of these reports are currently being considered by the contractor's insurers. The contractor remains committed to resolving the matter fully and is continuing to carry out preventative and reactive maintenance on the roof in the interim. Retention monies have not been paid to the contractor under the contract subject to the satisfactory resolution of this issue.

School Accommodation Provision

84. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason his Department has not facilitated the development of a full stream educate together school in Trim, County Meath (details supplied). [3821/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, the report of the Advisory Group to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector recommended that demand for patronage diversity should be met in areas of stable population by divesting patronage of existing schools where there is evidence of parental demand for change.

In 2012/13, my Department undertook surveys of parental preferences in 44 areas of stable population to establish the level of demand for a wider choice in the patronage of primary schools. Sufficient demand emerged in 28 areas, including the area referred to by the Deputy, and intensive consultations followed with the main Catholic patrons in each of these areas to

discuss divesting options.

It is important that school size is monitored and that a balance is preserved among all schools in school planning areas to ensure that one school is not expanding at the expense of another school, particularly in areas of stable population. However, overall demographic need in these areas will continue to be kept under review.

Education Funding

85. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the disparity between educational funding for educational psychologists in contrast to clinical psychologists; and the steps he will take to bridge the gap. [3848/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): It is presumed that the educational funding to which the Deputy refers relates to the Clinical Psychologist Traineeship programme operated within the Health Service Executive.

As the Deputy may be aware my Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) is a school-based educational psychological service to all first and second level schools. The NEPS mission is to support the wellbeing and the personal, social and educational development of all children through the application of psychological theory and practice in education, having particular regard for children with special educational needs.

NEPS bases its recruitment of staff on an open market offer, made through the Public Appointments Service, to appropriately qualified professionals. This process has proved successful in its application and intent over the years. Recruits thus identified and employed are supported through an induction programme and on-going professional development supports and the quality thereof is high and their retention very satisfactory.

Clinical Psychologists fulfil a particular function within the Health Sector which is subject to a number of contextual differences to those pertaining to Educational Psychologists in my Department and in which situation it has been deemed necessary to create a supported traineeship to secure and retain appropriately qualified personnel. A note on the matter supplied to my Department by the HSE follows.

Clinical Psychologist Trainee

Employment of psychologists in the Irish Health Services began in the mid-sixties. Mirroring developments in the United Kingdom, the initial cohort of psychologists recruited were all employed as clinical psychologists mainly within mental health services. This practice was formally recognised with the introduction of the Department of Health (DoH) regulations in 1979 governing the recruitment of psychologists which related specifically to clinical psychology, attached.

In the early 1970s, in order to address the growing need for clinical psychologists and in *the absence of formal training programmes, a clinical psychology apprenticeship in-service model was established within the Health Boards.*

In 1978, clinical psychology training accredited by the British Psychological Society (BPS) was developed by the Eastern Health Board in collaboration with the University of Dublin, Trinity College (TCD). Successful trainees were awarded the BPS Diploma in Clinical Psychology. This led in 1992 to the establishment of a clinical psychology training programme in TCD. In 1983, University College Dublin (UCD) established a clinical psychology training

programme in conjunction with Health Boards.

Currently, there are five doctoral level clinical psychology training programmes that have developed through and operate in partnership with the HSE. They are based at the National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG), University of Dublin, Trinity College (TCD), University College Dublin (UCD), University College Cork (UCC) and the University of Limerick (UL).

All five clinical psychology training programmes have, as required by the Accreditation Standards of PSI, *a central purpose which is to train professionally qualified clinical psychologists to work in the Irish health service. It is the only branch of psychology to which the PSI attribute this purpose.*

Parallel to the development of the partnership approach to clinical training between the HSE and the university sector, the PSI, in response to a request by the Department of Health to help meet the demand for psychologists at that time, established in 1992 its own in-service professional clinical psychology training programme. This course was discontinued in 2010. In 2015, approval was granted to establish a post graduate clinical psychology training programme in University College Cork (UCC). Clinical psychology is the only branch of psychology whose central purpose is to work in the health sector. This programme of study and clinical placements is specific to the mental health services in the HSE and the programme content and placement locations are specified by the HSE. Participants undergoing these programmes receive a contract for employment to the HSE and receive fee support. On completion of the programme of study the psychologists have a 3 year employment commitment to the HSE.

Workforce, Analysis and Informatics, National HR Directorate, HSE.

Private Security Authority

86. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason a licence renewal application (details supplied) is not available in Irish online; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3754/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Private Security Authority, established under the Private Security Services Act 2004 (as amended), is the statutory body with responsibility for the licensing and regulation of the private security industry in the State. The Authority is an independent body under the aegis of my Department and I have no involvement in its day to day operations.

I have been informed by the Authority that it is currently in the process of moving from paper based application systems to online services. While an online renewal application for employees is available in English, an Irish equivalent is not.

The Authority further informs me that An Coimisinéir Teanga had advised that there is no statutory obligation on the Authority to provide the online renewal service in Irish. The Authority is obliged to put in place a system which allows it deal with the public who apply in Irish. The Authority provides an application form in Irish to facilitate the public in this regard.

I understand that the Authority has provided the individual in question with an Irish version of the application form. If the person wishes to provide a security service they should complete the form and return it to the Authority who will process the application.

The Authority will be providing some services in Irish as part of the development of its new website which it hopes to launch later this year.

Visa Applications

87. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on the join family D visa application process; the criteria that must be met (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3861/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that full details on the documentation required for a “Join Family” Visa, including the Policy Document on Non-EEA Family Reunification, are available on the INIS website *www.inis.gov.ie*.

The Policy Document provides a comprehensive statement of national immigration policy in the area of family reunification. It should be noted that financial capacity is just one of the conditions considered when making a determination on a family reunification application and the circumstances of the parties concerned are considered in the round on a case by case basis.

It should be borne in mind, however, that the information contained on the website is intended to act as guidance only; it does not limit the discretion of the Visa Officer in dealing with individual applications. Therefore, all information that the applicant wishes to have taken into consideration should be included with a visa application. Additional clarification may be provided by the Visa Offices abroad including advising of additional documentation to demonstrate that the applicant/sponsor meets specific criteria.

If a person fails to demonstrate they meet the criteria for a “Join Family” visa then this may result in a negative decision on that application once it has been processed.

The policy of the Moscow Visa Office is to provide guidance to applicants and accept all applications due to be sent to their Office for processing. In the absence of the details of an individual application it is not possible to establish the events in relation to that individual.

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.

In addition, applicants may themselves e-mail queries directly to visamail@justice.ie.

Garda Investigations

88. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a matter regarding the case of a person (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3737/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I believe it was appropriate and correct that last week I, along with the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste, apologised on behalf of the State to Ms. Hayes, who was subjected to a prolonged ordeal that was simply wrong on every level.

The Deputy will appreciate that the decision to conduct a review of the investigation into the death of ‘Baby John’ is solely a matter for the Garda Commissioner. I welcome the announcement by An Garda Síochána that a new investigation, involving the Serious Crime Review

Team (SCRT) and local Gardaí. I also welcome the apology made personally to Ms. Hayes by the Garda Commissioner on behalf of An Garda Síochána. I have requested that anyone with information about the death of 'Baby John' should come forward with it. Any information, no matter how small, could play a vital role in helping An Garda Síochána bring this case to a successful conclusion.

Since the announcement of the review by the SCRT, a number of complex legal issues have emerged which require careful consideration. I will be consulting with the Office of the Attorney General on these issues and will keep the Cabinet apprised of all significant developments in the coming weeks.

I can inform the Deputy that I have been in contact with persons representing Joanne Hayes, who reiterated Ms. Hayes's request that her privacy be respected. I fully intend to respect those wishes and therefore I do not intend to make any further comment on these issues at the moment.

Garda Vetting Applications

89. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 337 of 20 September 2017, when a reply will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3739/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will be aware that employment vetting is carried out by An Garda Síochána in accordance with the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012-2016 in respect of persons who are employed or engaged in positions where they would have substantial unsupervised to children or vulnerable adults in the course of their employment or engagement. The primary purpose of this vetting is to enhance protection for children and vulnerable adults. This constitutes the main employment vetting function of An Garda Síochána. Employment vetting may also be carried out in respect of certain other employments, such as employment in An Garda Síochána itself or the private security industry.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that they have checked the records at the National Vetting Bureau and that no valid Garda vetting application has been received in respect of the person who is the subject of the Deputy's Question.

In these circumstances I can only advise the person in question to contact the relevant organisation to inquire as to the status of any application that may be made.

Garda Information and Communications Technology

90. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there is a formal tracking system to monitor crimestoppers information; and the action taken once that information is sent to a national unit or local division as recommended by the Garda Inspectorate in 2014. [3831/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested a report from the Garda authorities in relation to this matter and when this report is received I will contact the Deputy directly.

Garda Data

91. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of priority and civilian posts within An Garda Síochána that are unfilled; the date each post was approved by the Policing Authority and Department of Public Expenditure and Reform; the date the posts were advertised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3832/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware in accordance with section 26(1)(b) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 as amended, the Garda Commissioner has statutory responsibility for the recruitment of civilian staff and I, as Minister, have no role in the matter. Section 19 of the Act governs the sanctioning of additional civilian staff for An Garda Síochána and requires the approval of the Policing Authority subject to my consent and that of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

Currently 200 new civilian posts have been sanctioned to address critical skills and capacity gaps within An Garda Síochána and to backfill posts occupied by Gardaí identified for redeployment to policing duties. A further 47 posts have been approved by the Authority and are currently being considered by my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. I expect that some of these posts will be formally sanctioned in the near future. In addition, I understand that An Garda Síochána are engaging with the Authority in relation to the business case for a further 150 civilian posts to address skills and capacity issues across the organisation and to backfill Gardaí to be redeployed.

I am informed by the Commissioner that of the 200 sanctioned new civilian posts work is on-going on filling 65. Of these posts one is for a Chief Data Officer at Executive Director level with six at Principal Officer (PO) level. The competition for the Chief Data Officer post closed on 7 December last and three of the PO posts are being progressed with the Public Appointment Service (PAS). One PO post has been advertised internally and it is expected that an appointment will be made shortly. The remaining two PO posts are the subject of on-going discussion between my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to terms and conditions but I expect that progress will be made in relation to these posts shortly.

The remaining posts range from Assistant Principal Officer to Clerical Officer (or equivalent) and are being progressed in accordance with the relevant sanction by way of utilisation of existing PAS panels (23 posts) and via open competitions (35 posts of which 32 are at Executive Officer level). As the Deputy will be aware, the jobs market is competitive at the moment, and this can lead to some delays outside of the control of An Garda Síochána in appointing people to posts. This is due to the fact that some people may seek to avail of other opportunities as they arise. I am assured that An Garda Síochána is fully engaged with PAS to progress the filling of these posts as quickly as possible.

For the Deputy's information I have set out below in tabular form the details of the 65 posts remaining to be filled.

Post	Number	Date Sanction conveyed to An Garda Síochána
Executive Director Chief Data Officer	1	10/08/2017
Principal Officer - Data Protection Officer	1	15/12/2017
Principal Officer - ICT and HR	3 (2 ICT & 1 HR)	24/01/2017
Principal Officer - Fleet Manager	1	16/01/2018

Questions - Written Answers

Post	Number	Date Sanction conveyed to An Garda Síochána
Principal Officer - (Community Engagement)	1	18/01/2018
Assistant Principal	5	03/02/2017
Solicitor	1	24/01/2017
Garda Síochána Analysis Service - Crime and Policing Analysts EO Level	25	20/12/2017
Corporate Communications - 1 AP; 2 HEO and 7 EO	10	15/11/2017
Internal Audit - Executive Officer	2	16/1/2018
Redeployment - Clerical Officer and Executive Officer.	15 (5 have start dates agreed and 10 are in the vetting process)	03/02/2017
Total	65	

Garda Reform

92. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the implementation of the An Garda Síochána national operating framework; if this framework has been provided to him and the Policing Authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3833/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware the development of National Operating Framework is one of the initiatives included in the Garda Commissioner's Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021.

The Policing Authority is performing the important task of overseeing the delivery of this ambitious reform programme and is reporting to me on a regular basis. The Authority has produced four valuable reports to date, the most recent completed in December 2017, providing a critical analysis of progress. I would refer the Deputy to those reports which are available on my Department's website www.justice.ie for an update on the progress of the reform programme generally and specific initiatives.

I have requested the Commissioner for an update on the current status of the National Operating Framework and I will write to the Deputy on receipt of same.

Garda Reports

93. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on the promised culture audit within An Garda Síochána; if he has received an interim report; his plans to publish this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3834/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware the conduct of a culture audit development is one of the initiatives included in the Garda Commissioner's Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021.

The Policing Authority is performing the important task of overseeing the delivery of this ambitious reform programme and is reporting to me on a regular basis. The Authority has produced four valuable reports to date, the most recent completed in December 2017, providing a critical analysis of progress. I would refer the Deputy to those reports which are available on my Department's website www.justice.ie for an update on the progress of the reform pro-

gramme generally and specific initiatives.

I have requested the Commissioner for an update on the current status of the culture audit and I will write to the Deputy on receipt of same.

Policing Authority Reports

94. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he has received the fourth report on the assessment of implementation of changing policing in Ireland from the Policing Authority; the key findings of this report; when it will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3835/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I published the fourth progress report prepared by the Policing Authority on the implementation of the agreed recommendations in the Garda Inspectorate Report “Changing Policing in Ireland” on 23 January. It is available on my Department’s website. This is in keeping with my commitment to publish all such progress reports.

The Policing Authority is performing an important task in overseeing what is a major five year reform programme underway within An Garda Síochána through the vehicle of the Garda Commissioner’s Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021. The Authority’s s fourth progress report identifies welcome progress in a number of areas including in the areas of governance, reporting, pace, resourcing and prioritisation. These issues were highlighted as areas of concern in previous reports and it is welcome that An Garda Síochána is striving to address these matters. I understand that progress on these areas will be further reported on in the fifth progress report expected in April.

As the report makes clear, while there has been progress, significant improvements continue to be required particularly in the key areas of HR and ICT which are enablers for wider change across the organisation.

I have made it clear that 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. Last year I put in place a structured process of engagement between my Department and An Garda Síochána at a senior level to address concerns highlighted by the Authority’s assessment and to implement any necessary corrective action. That group will meet in the coming days to discuss the issues raised by the fourth progress report and other key elements of the reform agenda including civilianisation and redeployment. I also intend to meet the Commissioner in relation to the reform programme shortly.

The report highlights the critical importance of the 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 believe the only way to deliver world class policing in Ireland is to ensure that An Garda Síochána has the resources it needs and that those resources operate in an organisation whose culture is open and responsive and where the best management systems and practices are deployed. I am confident that the reform plan that is being implemented by An Garda Síochána, supported by the Government and overseen by the Policing Authority, has the capacity to achieve this.

Garda Investigations

95. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on the establishment of a national major investigations team within An Garda Síochána; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3841/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The information requested by the Deputy cannot be provided in the time available. I have requested the information sought from the Garda Commissioner and I will write to the Deputy on receipt of same.

Garda Data

96. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the amount An Garda Síochána recouped for the provision of police services on a non-public duty basis under section 30 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 in each of the years 2015 to 2017, by headings such as sports event, music event, non music event or other headings that are used; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3872/18]

97. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the criteria used to calculate the amount charged for the provision of police services on a non-public duty basis under section 30 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005; if he has satisfied himself that these criteria are appropriate and represent full cost recovery for An Garda Síochána; his plans to review these criteria; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3873/18]

98. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the incidents of non-payment of amounts charged for the provision of police services on a non-public duty basis under section 30 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 in each of the years 2015 to 2017; the actions taken in these circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3874/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 96 to 98, inclusive, together.

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 have been informed by the Garda authorities that the policing service provided in accordance with Section 30 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 is usually composed of a public duty and a non-public duty. In general, the public duty element is financed by the public purse, while An Garda Síochána seeks to recover all of the costs associated with providing the non-public duty element of the service. I am informed by the Garda authorities that, however, as it is not possible to absolutely define the demarcation line between public and non-public duty, it may not be feasible for An Garda Síochána to recover the total policing cost of any particular event.

The cost to the event holder is determined by the number of Gardaí deployed at a particular event, there is no charge for Garda reserves. The operational policing plan for a particular event is formulated by local operational management.

I understand there is currently a review under way in An Garda Síochána regarding the charging criteria and a draft policy should be completed in the first quarter 2018.

The amount recouped by An Garda Síochána for the provision of non-public duty under section 30 of An Garda Síochána Act 2015 in each of the years 2015 to 2017 is as set out below.

Category	2015	2016	2017
Sporting Fixtures	1,498,610	1,420,910	1,544,557
Concerts/Festivals	1,165,786	1,277,640	996,879
Other Events	1,979,333	2,514,397	2,370,402
Total	4,644,029	5,212,947	4,911,838

Total amounts of non-payments are set out below.

Year	Amount
2015	€128,458
2016	€237,651
2017	€1,323,616*

*The majority of the 2017 amount has only been invoiced in recent months.

I am further informed that reminders are issued to bodies for outstanding amounts. Failure to clear debts results in payment being sought upfront from hiring bodies for any future events.

Immigration Status

99. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when an application by a person (details supplied) for stamp 4 will be approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3887/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a decision on this particular request issued to the person concerned by registered post on 18 January 2018.

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

100. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if temporary or long-term residency on compassionate or humanitarian grounds can be offered to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3888/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it is not possible to identify the persons referred to by the Deputy due to the lack of detail provided. If the Deputy can provide further details such as the persons' full name (if different from that already provided), their date of birth, their GNIB Registration Number, a Passport number, I will have the matter investigated further.

If it is the case that the person in question has not engaged with the immigration service already he or she should do so as soon as possible.

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.

Travel Documents

101. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a temporary travel document will be issued to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3889/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned should make an application in writing to the Travel Document Section of INIS who will consider the application. Details on the process including the application form and the address to write to, is available on *www.inis.gov.ie*.

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

102. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when temporary or long-term residency will be offered to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3890/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that INIS is currently considering both of the cases concerned and that INIS expects to be in a position to write to both persons 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

103. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if short or long-term residency status will be awarded to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3891/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish

Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that it is not possible to identify the person referred to by the Deputy due to the lack of detail provided.

If the Deputy can provide further details such as the person's full name (if different from that already provided), their date of birth, their GNIB Registration Number, as well as similar details relating to the person's spouse, I will have the matter investigated further.

If it is the case that the person in question has not engaged with the immigration service already he or she should do so as soon as possible.

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

104. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the determination of residency status in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3892/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the position remains as outlined in my previous responses to the Deputy's Parliamentary Questions in the matter (question no. 107 on 17 November 2016, Question no. 46 on 19 January 2017 and question no. 63 on 9 February 2017 refer).

The person concerned was refused permission to remain in the State on 12 July 2016. The person referred to by the Deputy has made no further request for a permission to remain in the State since that date.

If the person wishes to request further permission to remain in the State, they should write directly to Residence Division Unit 1, Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, 13/14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 as soon as possible.

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.

Leave to Remain

105. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress in the determination of eligibility for long-term residency-naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3893/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the situation remains as

outlined in my response to his Parliamentary Question number 510 on 16 January 2018.

The person referred to by the Deputy was refused permission to remain in the State by INIS in 2016. The person concerned has no permission to be in the State since that date and has not submitted a further request for such a permission.

If it is the case that the person in question has not engaged with the immigration service already he or she should do so as soon as possible.

If the person wishes to request further permission to remain in the State they should write directly to Residence Division Unit 1, Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, 13/14 Burgh Quay, Dublin 2 as soon as possible.

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.

Deportation Orders Re-examination

106. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a full review of the case and decision to deport a person (details supplied) will be arranged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3899/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Services (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order made on 12 November 2008, following the refusal of the international protection claim made by the person concerned and the detailed consideration of their case under Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). That Order remains valid and in place.

Representations were received from the person concerned requesting that the Deportation Order be revoked, pursuant to the provisions of Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). Following the consideration of that request, a decision was taken in August 2016 that the Deportation Order should be affirmed and this decision was communicated to the person concerned by registered post dated 04 August 2016.

It is open to the person concerned to submit further representations requesting that the Deportation Order be revoked, pursuant to Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). However, I wish to make clear that such an application would require substantial grounds to be successful.

The Deputy might wish to note that the effect of a Deportation Order is that the person named on the Order is legally obliged to leave the State and to remain outside of the State. The enforcement of the Deportation Order in this case is now an operational matter for the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

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

107. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a temporary or long-term residency stamp 4 will be awarded in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3903/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), written representations have been submitted on behalf of the person concerned.

These representations, together with all other information and documentation on file, will be fully considered, under Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation, in advance of a final decision being made.

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

Naturalisation Applications

108. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when naturalisation will be awarded to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3916/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that there is no record of a current application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application and supporting documentation is received.

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.

Leave to Remain

109. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if all required documentation has been supplied to the relevant section of his Department by a person (details supplied) in order to facilitate their application for permission to remain; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3917/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned has submitted written representations.

With a view to having the case of the person concerned progressed, a representative of the INIS wrote to the person concerned on 18 January 2018, requesting the submission of specific documentation. The position in the State of the person concerned can be further considered upon receipt of the requested documentation.

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.

Residency Permits

110. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of special residency in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3921/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that from the limited information provided it is not possible to adequately respond to the Deputy's question.

If the persons concerned could write directly to Unit 2 - Residence Division supplying more information relating to all three persons, then INIS could examine the matter further with a view of offering advice. Information to be submitted should include, at a minimum: -

1. Full copies of all three passports
2. Copies of GNIB cards
3. Copies of marriage certificates
4. Copy of a birth certificate for the daughter concerned and for any other siblings
5. Medical certificate detailing the father's condition
6. Employment details for all concerned
7. Evidence of finances available showing how they they will support themselves financially as a family.

The persons should also be advised to consult with www.inis.gov.ie particularly in relation to any visa entry requirements that may apply.

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.

Brexit Issues

111. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which she continues to establish new trade links with a view to post-Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3915/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): Ireland is an small open economy and dependent on international trade and investment for sustainable growth. In this context, promoting access to and deepening existing trade relationships across a diversified portfolio of export markets is a key priority and this is made even more important in light of the potential impacts of Brexit. Increased trade provides for stronger economic growth which creates employment and grows our economy. Overall, export growth in Ireland in recent years has been exceptionally strong and exports continue to contribute positively to growth.

As well as the global efforts supported by Enterprise Ireland, our policy objective is achieved through our support for the suite of EU Free Trade Agreements, and through multilateral agreements at WTO level, which both seek to deliver regulatory cooperation and reduced tariffs. The EU suite of Free Trade Agreements with third countries helps to open new markets, break down barriers and provide new opportunities for Irish firms. Brexit has reinforced the importance and the urgency of pursuing an ambitious programme of negotiations at EU level and Ireland fully supports the EU Commission's ambitious Free Trade Agreement agenda which seeks to accelerate the delivery of EU trade deals with leading economies and regional blocs.

Most recently, the EU–Canada Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement (CETA) entered into force provisionally from the 21st September 2017. This means that Irish companies may now take advantage of the all important provisions of CETA including the elimination of tariffs on almost all key exports, access to the Canadian procurement market, the easing of regulatory barriers and more transparent rules for market access. CETA will present new opportunities for Irish business and professionals to work and provide services in Canada.

The EU and Mexico hope to reach political agreement early this year on the modernisation of the EU-Mexico Global Agreement, to include provisions on regulatory cooperation, increased trade in agriculture and food, common sanitary standards and sustainable development. Ireland supports comparable trade conditions for investors and businesses across the Americas, making it easier for Irish businesses to trade in and enter these markets. Negotiations with the Mercosur countries continues and political agreement was reached last year with Japan on an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). The EU/Japan EPA has the potential to generate significant benefits for Ireland. The agri-food sector, which is Ireland's largest indigenous industry, will see particular benefits, with improved access for beef and dairy products. The Agreement will also ensure tariff elimination on medical devices and pharmaceutical products which are manufactured in Ireland.

Moreover, in his September 2017 State of the Union Address to the European Parliament, Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, proposed opening trade negotiations with Australia and New Zealand. The draft negotiating mandates for Australia and New Zealand are currently being discussed by the Commission and Member States.

The EU's suite of Free Trade Agreements coupled with our programme of Minister led trade missions and bilateral visits overseas have provided a key foundation on which to further build

our strong economic and trading links in export markets and this will continue. Enterprise Ireland delivered an impressive programme of international trade events in 2017, giving Irish companies the opportunity to meet with potential buyers and network with key influencers in countries around the world. In total, 57 internationally focused trade events were organised by Enterprise Ireland in 2017 including ministerial-led trade missions to Canada, Singapore and Japan, the UAE and Oman, and a major trade programme as part of the Presidential State visit to Australia.

Ireland will also continue to support the EU's ambitious programme of negotiating new Free Trade Agreements giving Irish firms expanded market access and a predictable trading environment in third countries. To this end, my Department has commissioned a major examination of the economic opportunities and impacts for Ireland arising from EU Free Trade Agreements which we hope will be available later this year.

IDA Ireland Data

112. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 617 of 11 October 2016, the available IDA lands at the end of quarter 4 2017; the occupied IDA lands at the end of quarter 4 of 2017, by county and town, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3852/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The availability of an adequate supply of marketable serviced land and buildings in advance of demand is a key element in the IDA's ability to compete for mobile foreign direct investment. The availability of property solutions allows projects to commence at an earlier date by diminishing much of the difficulties associated with land acquisition, planning and construction. It is, therefore, an important means by which the IDA can encourage and attract new investors to the country and especially to regional Ireland.

The tables list all IDA Ireland land available for marketing (Table A) and occupied IDA Ireland properties (Table B) as at the end of Quarter 4 of 2017:

Table A

Property County	Property Town	Property Name	Hectares Available
County Carlow	Bagenalstown	Bagenalstown	0.1555
County Cavan	Cavan	Cavan B&T Park	9.05
County Cork	Youghal	Springfield Estate	1.87
County Cork	Youghal	Foxhole	1.0063
County Cork	Skibbereen	Poundlick Estate	3.86
County Cork	Kanturk	Mallow B & T Park	0.6831
County Cork	Kinsale	Rathhallikeen	0.1298
County Cork	Kanturk	Pulleen	2.47
County Cork	Fermoy	Rathealy	0.9407
County Cork	Cork City	Cork City Kilbarry B&T Park	57.53
County Cork	Carrigtohill	Carrigtohill B&T Park	11.08
County Cork	Charleville	Rathgoggan Estate	1.86
County Cork	Bantry	Drombrow	1.9627
County Cork	Bandon	Laragh Estate	1.37
County Cork	Cork City	Ringaskiddy	149.32

Property County	Property Town	Property Name	Hectares Available
County Cork	Cork City	Cork B&T Park	0.42
County Cork	Cork City	Ringaskiddy Estate	0.2023
County Cork	Cork City	Rossa Ave	0.1152
County Cork	Millstreet	Millstreet IDA Estate	0.1133
County Cork	Fermoy	Fermoy B & T Park	6.05
County Cork	Carrigtohill East	Cork Carrigtohill East	53.1576
County Donegal	Ballyshannon	Ballyshannon	1.0672
County Donegal	Donegal/Tully/Clar/B	Lurganboy	0.872
County Donegal	Letterkenny	Knocknamona	1.35
County Donegal	Letterkenny/Manorcun	Letterkenny B & T Park	19.33
County Donegal	Letterkenny/Manorcun	Letterkenny Lisnenan 2	0.38
County Donegal	Letterkenny/Manorcun	Letterkenny B & T Park	2.6282
County Dublin	Dublin 24	Dublin 24 - Whitestown Ind Est	0.56
County Dublin	Dublin 11	Dublin 11 - Poppintree Ind. Est.	3.78
County Dublin	Blanchardstown	Cruiserath	27.1925
County Dublin	Blanchardstown	Blanchardstown B & T Park	10.4956
County Dublin	Dublin 12	Dubl 12 - Ballymount Ind. Est.	0.0249
County Dublin	Swords	Swords Bus. Park, Green-fields	2.04
County Dublin	Dublin 5	Belcamp - B & T Park	46.44
County Galway	Tuam	Tuam Business Park	1.4794
County Galway	Roundstone	Roundstone	1.42
County Galway	Mountbellew/Ballygar	Mountbellew Business Park	0.1979
County Galway	Gort	Gort Business Park	1.1217
County Galway	Glenamaddy	Glenamaddy Business Park	0.9105
County Galway	Galway City	Parkmore B&T Park (W&E)	26.75
County Galway	Ballygar	Ballygar Site	3.4398
County Galway	Ballinasloe	Ballinasloe B&T Park	8.88
County Galway	Tuam	Tuam Science & Technology Park	9.92
County Galway	Galway City	Oranmore Science & Tech Park	26.78
County Galway	Athenry	Athenry	92.4351
County Kerry	Killorglin	Farrantoreen	0.74
County Kerry	Killarney	Killarney B&T Park	1.14
County Kerry	Tralee	Acq c.1.0Ha Tralee	1
County Kildare	Newbridge	Newbridge Business Park	2.9339
County Kilkenny	Kilkenny	Purcellsinch Ind. Park	3.95
County Kilkenny	Kilkenny/Bennetsbrid	Kilkenny B&T Park	13.4
County Kilkenny	Belview	Belview	22.8
County Laois	Portlaoise	Portlaoise B&T Park	9.62
County Leitrim	Carrick-On-Shannon	Carrick-On-Shannon B & T Park	6.4
County Leitrim	Carrick-On-Shannon	Carrick-On-Shannon	0.1845
County Leitrim	Drumshanbo	Drumshanbo	0.2238
County Leitrim	Manorhamilton	Manorhamilton	0.9264
County Leitrim	Manorhamilton	Carrickleitrim	0.4208

Questions - Written Answers

Property County	Property Town	Property Name	Hectares Available
County Leitrim	Mohill	Mohill	2.0693
County Limerick	Limerick	The National Technology Park	64.72
County Limerick	Limerick	Raheen Business Park	53.86
County Longford	Longford	Aghafad	2.0272
County Longford	Longford	Longford Industrial Estate	1.0176
County Louth	Greenore	Greenore	0.0272
County Louth	Dundalk	Dundalk Finnabair B&T Park	5.74
County Louth	Dundalk/Ravensdale	Dundalk Mullagharlin East	12.8
County Louth	Dundalk	Dundalk Mullagharlin	44.175
County Louth	Drogheda	Drogheda B&T Park	22.53
County Mayo	Ballina	Ballina Business Park	0.6
County Mayo	Bangor Erris	Bango Erris Industrial Park	0.607
County Mayo	Castlebar	Castlebar B&T Park	3.0897
County Mayo	Foxford	Foxford Business Park	0.6798
County Mayo	Ballina	Ballina	10.6141
County Meath	Navan Boyerstown Bro	Navan B&T Park	24.21
County Monaghan	Monaghan	Monaghan Business Park	7.53
County Offaly	Tullamore	Tullamore Industrial Estate	0.3541
County Offaly	Tullamore	Tullamore B&T Park	8
County Offaly	Clara	Clara	0.4872
County Roscommon	Roscommon	Roscommon B&T Park	4.63
County Roscommon	Castlerea	Station Rd	1.1735
County Sligo	Sligo	Cleveragh Business Park	0.3035
County Sligo	Easkey	Easkey Business Park	0.0611
County Sligo	Sligo	Finisklin B & T Park	10.97
County Sligo	Sligo	Sligo - Oakfield Site	31.3186
County Tipperary	Tipperary	Knockanrawley	2.08
County Tipperary	Clonmel	Clonmel Bus Park	20.071
County Waterford	Waterford	Waterford Industrial Estate	5.19
County Waterford	Waterford	Waterford B&T Park	23.88
County Waterford	Dungarvan	Dungarvan B & T Park	11.5675
County Westmeath	Mullingar	Clonmore Ind. Est.	6.8
County Westmeath	Athlone	Athlone B&T Park Garry-castle	11.3647
County Westmeath	Athlone	Garrankesh Estate	0.0926
County Westmeath	Mullingar	Mullingar B&T Park	22.5
County Wexford	Wexford	Wexford B&T Park	3.14
County Wexford	Wexford	Wexford Whitemills	0.066
County Wexford	Enniscorthy	Moyne Upper	0.39
County Wicklow	Arklow	Arklow Kilbride	0.1197
County Wicklow	Greystones	Greystones B&T Park	17.93
County Wicklow	Arklow	Arklow B&T Park	14.56

Table B

Property Name	Property Town	Property County
Cootehill	Cootehill	County Cavan
Mallow Quarterstown Estate	Mallow	County Cork

Property Name	Property Town	Property County
Brookpark	Dunmanway	County Cork
Underhill	Dunmanway	County Cork
Mahon Estate	Cork City	County Cork
Little Island Estate	Cork City	County Cork
Ballincollig	Cork City	County Cork
Plot 4 Roadway	Cork	County Cork
Letterkenny Ballyraine	Letterkenny/Manorcun	County Donegal
Windyhall	Letterkenny	County Donegal
Dublin - South County B&T Park	Dublin 18	County Dublin
Swords - Balheary	Swords	County Dublin
Dubl 5 - Clonsaugh Ind. Est.	Dublin 5	County Dublin
Baldoyle Industrial Estate	Dublin 13	County Dublin
Dubl 12 - Ballymount Ind. Est.	Dublin 12	County Dublin
Clondalkin Industrial Estate	Clondalkin	County Dublin
Cherry Orchard Ind. Est.	Dublin 10	County Dublin
Santry Ave Ind. Est.	Dublin 9	County Dublin
Portumna Business Park	Portumna	County Galway
Loughrea B&T Park	Loughrea/Tynagh	County Galway
Gort Business Park 2	Gort/Kinvara	County Galway
Ballybrit Business Park Lower	Galway	County Galway
Mervue B&T Park	Galway	County Galway
Athenry Business Park	Athenry	County Galway
Gortamullen Estate	Kenmare	County Kerry
Reenard Estate	Cahersiveen	County Kerry
Meilita Road	Kildare	County Kildare
Monread Road	Naas	County Kildare
Kildare Town	Kildare	County Kildare
Castledermot	Castledermot	County Kildare
Townpark	Athy	County Kildare
Rathcronan	Ballinalee	County Longford
Coes Rd - Dundalk	Dundalk	County Louth
Ballinrobe Business Park	Ballinrobe	County Mayo
Charlestown Industrial Park	Charlestown	County Mayo
Castlebar Industrial Park	Castlebar	County Mayo
Ashbourne	Ashbourne	County Meath
Ballybay	Ballybay	County Monaghan
Edenderry Industrial Estate	Edenderry	County Offaly
Boyle Industrial Estate	Boyle	County Roscommon
Racecourse Road	Roscommon	County Roscommon
Castlerea Business Park	Castlerea	County Roscommon
Athlone Bunnally	Athlone (Environs)	County Roscommon
Redmonstown	Clonmel	County Tipperary
Gurtnafleur	Clonmel	County Tipperary
Cashel	Cashel	County Tipperary
Spafield	Cashel	County Tipperary
Tallow	Tallow	County Waterford
Clogheran	Dungarvan	County Waterford
Cappoquin	Cappoquin	County Waterford

Property Name	Property Town	Property County
Gorey	Gorey	County Wexford
Arklow Cemetry Road,	Arklow	County Wicklow
Lisnenan Industrial Park	Ballybofey, Lisnenan	County Donegal
Ballinamore	Willowfield Road, Ballinamore	County Leitrim

IDA Ireland Site Visits

113. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when quarter 4 2017 IDA site visits data will be available. [3853/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I understand that the data in question will be available in the first week of February.

Joint Labour Committees

114. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the joint labour committees in operation per sector, in tabular form. [3855/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): The table sets out details of the Joint Labour Committees (JLCs) that are currently in place.

JLC	Members Appointed	Activity since re-establishment
Agriculture	No	None
Catering (outside Dublin)	No	None
Catering	No	None
Contract Cleaning	Yes	First Employment Regulation Order made on 1st October 2015. Second Employment Regulation Order made 27th October 2016.
Hairdressing	Yes	Committee held a number of meetings in 2017 but no proposals agreed.
Hotels (excluding Dublin & Cork)	No	None
Retail Grocery & Allied Trades	No	None
Security	Yes	First Employment Regulation Order made on 1st October 2015. Second Employment Regulation Order made on 30th May 2017.

State Aid

115. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the remit of the state aid modernisation working group; her plans for the SAM working group which will take place here in April 2018; and if draft proposals have been submitted by member states with respect to changing current state aid thresholds at EU level. [3856/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The objective of the State Aid Working Group is the exchange of views and best practice on the implementation of State Aid Rules among Member States. The WG is currently chaired by France and this changes every 12-18 months. Bulgaria will host the next working group meeting on 2 February 2018 where arrangements will be finalised for the April 27 meeting which is provisionally scheduled for Dublin.

To date Member States have not requested changes to State Aid rules in response to Brexit. Officials of my Department have had discussions with senior officials from DG Competition to sensitise them to both the potential and the real difficulties encountered by Irish businesses as a result of the UK's decision to leave the EU. Furthermore, in November 2017, the then Tánaiste met with Commissioner Vestager. An outcome from this meeting was the establishment of a Working Group comprising representatives from DG Comp, the Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation, Enterprise Ireland and Department of Agriculture. The objective of the Group is to scope and design schemes to support enterprise impacted by Brexit in line with State Aid rules. Should issues arise that require an approach that does not fit within the existing State Aid rules, this will be raised as part of the Working Group discussions.

Civil Service Staff Data

116. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of full time and part time civil servants working in the state aid unit by administrative grade. [3857/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The State Aid Section is situated in the Finance for Growth and State Aid Unit of the Indigenous Enterprise Development Division of my Department. The overall goal of the Division is to work with relevant stakeholders to ensure that appropriate supports are in place to promote and develop entrepreneurship, to help businesses to start, scale and export, and to advocate across the wider system for a supportive business environment (for example, tax policy, skills availability etc.).

The specific role of the State Aid Section is to ensure compliance of this Department's Industrial Development schemes with EU State Aid rules and provide guidance to other Departments on how to achieve the same in relation to their schemes.

I have set out in tabular format below the staffing details of the State Aid Section:

Grade	No.
Principal Officer	1
Assistant Principal Officer	1
Higher Executive Officer	1
Executive Officer	1
Clerical Officer	1
Total	5

Brexit Issues

117. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when the €300 million Brexit loan scheme fund announced in budget 2018 for SME businesses will open for applications; the length of time the fund will remain open for applications; the criteria for applying; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3858/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Brexit Loan Scheme announced during Budget 2018 will provide affordable working capital financing to eligible Irish businesses that are either currently impacted by Brexit, or which will be in the future. The Scheme will be delivered by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) through commercial lenders to get much needed working capital into Irish businesses.

The Scheme will be open to businesses of up to 499 employees, which can also demonstrate that they are significantly exposed to the impact (or potential impact) of Brexit. They must be a viable business, doing business in Ireland, and they must have a business development strategy. The scheme will be open both to State Agency clients and those businesses that do not have any relationship with State Agencies.

The Scheme is expected to open for applications at the end of March 2018, and will run until the 31st of March 2020.

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement

118. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to publish an account of the investigative failures of a trial (details supplied) identified by a person; and the steps that are being taken to address same. [3859/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I intend to publish an account of the investigative failures identified by Judge Aylmer and the steps that are being taken to address them as soon as possible. Approval of the Court is being sought to publish the official transcripts of the trial.

It is important to understand the factors that led to such mistakes being made and to take appropriate steps to address these shortcomings.

These steps include ongoing reform within the ODCE, including ongoing recruitment of professional expertise, and the establishment, as announced by Government last November, of the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement as an agency, to provide it with greater autonomy and ensure it is better equipped to investigate increasingly complex breaches of company law.

Work on the drafting of the necessary General Scheme of a Bill to give effect to this decision is progressing. It is expected that the General Scheme of a Bill to give effect to this decision will be published by Q2 2018, with publication of the Bill by Q4 2018.

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

119. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 322 of 5 December 2017, if there is a permanent speech and language therapist in place in a school (details supplied); and the reason another school does not have a permanent speech and language therapist. [3744/18]

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

120. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3698/18]

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 Status

121. **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. [3701/18]

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.

Mental Health Services Provision

122. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if a person's (details supplied) need for more frequent psychiatric appointments will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3708/18]

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.

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

123. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for orthodontic treatment. [3712/18]

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 Waiting Lists

124. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the number persons on the waiting list in County Laois for orthodontic treatment; and the length of time persons are waiting. [3713/18]

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 Data

125. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the number of full-time and part-time orthodontists employed by the HSE in County Laois; and the level of service the part time orthodontists provide. [3714/18]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

126. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health his plans to investigate matters relating to a person (details supplied) in County Roscommon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3715/18]

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 Staff

127. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether patients in public hospitals that are to be treated by consultants not on the Medical Council's specialist register should be made aware of this fact in advance; and if so, his plans to ensure that such information is provided to patients in public hospitals. [3721/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly on this matter. It is established policy that all consultants be on the Medical Council's specialist register. The HSE has been working to ensure that all consultant posts are filled accordingly and to address situations where this is not the case.

Haddington Road Agreement Implementation

128. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the hospitals in which the reforms introduced under the Haddington Road agreement regarding the operation of the working day over a period from 8am to 8pm are being applied in full; the hospitals in which this is not implemented; and the reason therefor, in tabular form [3722/18]

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

Non-Consultant Hospital Doctors

129. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the hospitals in which the transfer of tasks previously undertaken by non-consultant hospital doctors to nurses in return for the restoration of the time and one-sixth twilight payment has been implemented in full; the hospitals in which this is implemented; and the reason therefor, in tabular form. [3723/18]

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

Hospital Consultant Contracts

130. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the hospitals in which consultants are routinely rostered to carry out duties on a Saturday or Sunday, in tabular form. [3724/18]

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

Public Sector Pensions

131. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if a matter (details supplied) regarding the State pension age will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3732/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My colleague, the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, Paschal Donohoe T.D., secured Government approval in December 2017 for an increase in the compulsory retirement age from 65 years to 70 years for public servants who currently are required to retire at age 65 years. Legislation will be necessary to effect these changes and the General Scheme of a Bill was also approved by Government at that time. Minister Donohoe has indicated that he would ask the Attorney General to prioritise the drafting of this legislation so that the new compulsory retirement age would become effective as soon as possible.

The Government also agreed, in advance of the legislation coming into effect, that interim arrangements could be introduced, for serving public servants who reach the age of 65 years between the date of the Government Decision and the coming into effect of the necessary legislation. These arrangements enable such public servants to be retained until they reach the age of eligibility for Contributory State Pension, which is currently age 66 years. My Department has advised the HSE and other agencies of these interim measures.

The minimum pension age (the earliest date at which someone can retire and receive their pension) will not be affected by the new arrangements.

Hospital Appointments Status

132. **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. [3738/18]

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.

Health Care Infrastructure Provision

133. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding construction progress of a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3750/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the HSE is responsible for the delivery of health care infrastructure projects, the Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in relation to the proposed capital works at An Tuath Nua training centre at COPE, Montenotte, Cork.

Vaccination Programme

134. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health the way in which he plans to identify the persons that are at risk of suffering from side effects due to the chronic stimulation of their immune system through the gardasil HPV vaccine; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3751/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Vaccination is regarded as one of the safest and most cost-effective of all health care interventions. It is also one of the most effective ways a parent can protect the health of their child. Ireland's childhood immunisation programmes have had a huge impact in improving the health of the Irish population. Diseases that used to be common in this country and around the world such as polio, measles, diphtheria, whooping cough and many other serious infectious diseases are now preventable by vaccination.

Most people will get a HPV infection during their lifetime and most of these infections will not require further treatment. However, in some women, HPV infections can cause changes in the cervix that can develop into cervical cancer. Every year in Ireland about 300 women get cervical cancer and 90 women will die from it. Cervical cancer is the second most common cause of death due to cancer in women aged between 25 to 39 years of age. Worldwide cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer in women. In 2012 there were over 500,000 new cases and over 250,000 deaths.

The HPV vaccine protects against certain HPV types which causes 7 out of 10 cervical cancers. Therefore most cervical cancers can be prevented by the vaccine. This is the message that we want parents to hear. Although HPV covers 7 out of 10 cervical cancers it is still very important for women to have regular smear tests to detect cancers caused by HPV types not covered by the vaccine.

Unfounded claims have been made of an association between HPV vaccination and a number of conditions experienced by a group of young women - there is no scientific evidence that the vaccine causes long term illnesses. It appears that some girls first suffered symptoms around the time they received the HPV vaccine, and understandably some parents have connected the vaccine to their daughter's condition.

The Health Products Regulatory Authority and the European Medicines Agency continually monitor adverse events to vaccination. HPV is one of the most closely studied and monitored medicinal products. The vast majority of reports received by the HPRA have been consistent with the expected pattern of short term adverse side effects for the vaccine, as described in the product information. These are usually mild and temporary reactions to any kind of vaccination.

The misinformation concerning the HPV vaccine appears to be having an impact - uptake rates have fallen from 87% in 2014/15 to 51% in 2016/17. The Irish Cancer Society state, that based on national cancer statistics the drop in the rate of uptake to 50% for the 2016-2017 academic year, will have the following consequences:

- The death of at least 40 girls with cervical cancer who did not receive the HPV vaccine
- A further 100 girls will develop cervical cancer and will require life altering treatment and,
- An additional 1000 girls will require invasive therapy to prevent the precancerous form of HPV.

I would urge any parent who has doubts or questions about vaccination to engage with your

family doctor, or alternatively to visit the HPV website – www.hpv.ie. These sources of information are clear and accurate and will answer any queries you may have.

Hospital Charges

135. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the ethical rationale and legal basis for the recurring levying of a day inpatient charge for ongoing venesection treatments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3758/18]

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

The issue of the application of the public in-patient charge of €80 for venesection for Hereditary Haemochromatosis patients in Acute Hospitals is currently being considered in my Department.

Hospitals Data

136. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons waiting zero to three, three to six, six to nine, nine to 12, 12 to 18, 18 to 24 and over 24 months, respectively, for an appointment at the nerve conduction clinic at Portiuncula Hospital, Ballinasloe by the end of December 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3759/18]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

137. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health his plans to increase the capacity of the early intervention team in the HSE to meet demand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3764/18]

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

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

General Practitioner Data

138. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the number of general practitioners participating in the GP visit card scheme for those under six years of age in the Dublin 1, 3 and 7 areas; and the way in which this cover compares with the national average per 1,000 of population. [3769/18]

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.

Primary Care Centres Provision

139. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the status of a primary care centre for east County Meath; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3786/18]

140. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health the status of a primary care centre for Drogheda, County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3787/18]

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

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

Health Care Infrastructure Provision

141. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the financial contribution his Department and the HSE will make for the provision of a second hospice suite at a hospital (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3798/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the HSE is responsible for the delivery of health care infrastructure projects, the Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in relation to this matter.

EU Directives

142. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health if a reply will issue to correspondence from an association (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3800/18]

144. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health the reason registered chiropractors have not been included in the European Union Basic Safety Standards For Protection Against Dangers Arising from Medical Exposure to Ionising Radiation Regulations 2018; his plans to amend the regulations to include members of that profession; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3813/18]

145. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been brought to the amended European Union Basic Safety Standards for Protection Against Dan-

gers Arising from Medical Exposure to Ionising Radiation Regulations 2018 as suggested by an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3814/18]

148. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to concerns regarding the basic safety standards for protection against the dangers arising from exposure to ionising radiation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3845/18]

149. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health his views on a request made by an organisation (details supplied). [3847/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 142, 144, 145, 148 and 149 together.

These questions relate to the transposition of the medical provisions of the Basic Safety Standards Directive (BSSD) by my Department and whether chiropractors will be designated as referrers and practitioners in the transposing regulations.

Ionising radiation has many beneficial applications however as the use of ionising radiation increases, so does the potential for health hazards if not properly used or contained. The BSSD is an essential piece of legislation which protects the public, patients, workers and others from all forms of ionising radiation.

The Department of Health conducted a general consultation on the BSSD in June 2017 and sought views on the provisions of the Directive where Member States had discretion. The Chiropractic Association of Ireland (CAI) was included in the Department’s notification of the consultation process and arrangements were made to contact all licence-holders of ionising radiation equipment advising them of the consultation. Information on the consultation process was posted on the Department’s website. No response was received from the Chiropractic Association of Ireland or any individual identifying as a chiropractor.

The transposing statutory instrument for the BSSD will revoke and replace existing regulations from 2002. The existing regulations do not designate chiropractors as referrers or practitioners. Chiropractors who refer individuals for medical exposures, carry out medical exposures or other related functions are not in compliance with the existing regulations.

The current regulations lack inspection or enforcement provisions, however, in the new regulations HIQA will have the inspection and enforcement powers to enforce compliance and contravention of the new regulations will be an offence.

The statutory instrument transposing the BSSD will designate those who may refer for radiological tests, those who may carry them out and other functions and in this regard I propose to designate nurses, doctors, dentists and radiographers as appropriate.

The proposed designation of relevant professionals is based on patient safety and public health considerations reflected in the advice of the Chief Medical Officer.

The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment has overall responsibility for the transposition of the BSSD. My Department will finalise the medical provisions of the BSSD in the coming weeks.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage

143. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health if approval will be given for the

freestyle libre device to be included in the long term illness scheme. [3809/18]

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.

Questions Nos. 144 and 145 answered with Question No. 142.

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

146. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health the reason the Health Service Executive and his Department are not including persons of all ages in the libre reimbursement scheme; if they will be included at a future date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3820/18]

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

Medicinal Products Reimbursement

147. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Health the status of persons with type 1 diabetes that wish to use freestyle libre in view of the recent decision to reimburse the cost of this technology for children and young persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3842/18]

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.

Question Nos. 148 and 149 answered with Question No. 142.

Long-Term Illness Scheme Eligibility

150. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health when the freestyle libre system will be made available under the LTI scheme for persons with diabetes; if availability will not be restricted only to persons with type 1 diabetes but will be made available to each person on multi daily insulin injections based on clinical need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3862/18]

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

Health Care Professionals

151. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the level of consultation with health care support assistants in establishing a new roster system; if he and the HSE will ensure continuity of care on the rosters with regard to the time needed to carry out duties required; the minimum number of persons on each roster and other issues including travel time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3871/18]

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

Medical Card Applications

152. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will issue in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3898/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information was issued to Oireachtas members.

Medicinal Products Supply

153. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when versatis 5% medicated plasters can be restored in the quantity required to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3901/18]

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 – was approximately €1.8 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 has been reimbursed in the community drugs schemes since 2010. The projected budget impact on introduction 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.

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, only 5-10% of prescribing of this product has been 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 its appropriate use, ensuring that PHN patients continue to receive this treatment. The HSE estimates that this protocol will reduce annual 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, since 1 December 2017, non-shingles patients no longer receive 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.

Medical Card Applications

154. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if in the case of renewal of medical cards in the case of persons (details supplied), his attention was drawn to the fact that their card renewed with an incorrect doctor; if the error will be corrected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3902/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information was issued to Oireachtas members.

Health Services Provision

155. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which rehabilitation and-or support can be made available to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3922/18]

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

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

Basic Payment Scheme Eligibility

156. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if solar farmlands are covered in the single farm payment; if not, his plans for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3700/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Support under the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) is payable upon activation of an eligible hectare per payment entitlement. In general terms an eligible hectare is one that is used for an agricultural activity.

In line with the Department's current approach on land eligibility, where the area of a parcel covered by solar panels is 70% or greater of the overall parcel, that parcel will be wholly ineligible. If less than 70% is covered by solar panels and the agricultural activity is not hampered by the presence of the solar panels, the area not covered by solar panels may be eligible.

There are no proposals to change the eligibility requirements pertaining to solar panels at present.

Flood Relief Schemes Applications

157. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in payment being issued to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal under the Inishowen flood damage relief measure 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3704/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the Flood Damage Relief Measure was received from the person named by the Department on 22nd September 2017. This application is currently being processed. A Department official has made direct contact with the applicant with a view to resolving outstanding issues. Upon resolution any payment due will issue to the applicant.

Flood Relief Schemes Applications

158. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in payment being issued to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal under the Inishowen flood relief measure 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3705/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application to receive financial aid under the Flood Damage Relief Measure was received in the Department on 25th September 2017. This application has been finalised and payment will issue shortly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Flood Relief Schemes Applications

159. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Donegal under the In-

ishowen flood relief measure 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3706/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application to receive financial aid under the Flood Damage Relief Measure was received in the Department on 26th September 2017. This application has been finalised and payment will issue shortly to the nominated bank account of the person named.

Food Labelling

160. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the labelling of food in Irish; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3707/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The general framework for the labelling of food products has been established under Regulation (EU) No. 1169/2011.

This Regulation requires, under Article 15, that the labelling of food products be provided “in a language easily understood by the consumers of the Member States where a food is marketed.” Additionally, Member States can “stipulate that the particulars shall be given in one or more languages from among the official languages of the Union.

In the Irish context, S.I. No. 556 of 2014 (European Union (Provision of Food Information to Consumers) Regulations) sets out, under Regulation 12, that labelling of food must be provided, at a minimum, in English with the option of additional labelling in the Irish language.

GLAS Payments

161. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a payment under the GLAS scheme will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3719/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The above named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015. Payments in respect of scheme years 2015 and 2016 have been made.

All GLAS claims must clear validation checks before payment can be made. Department officials are working proactively to complete the checks to allow for the issue of payments. Once this case clears the validations the 2017 advance payment will be made. GLAS payments are issuing on a weekly basis.

Bovine Disease Controls

162. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a matter (details supplied) regarding the testing of deer for tuberculosis will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3720/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The responsibility for the management of wild deer on public lands and the issuing of hunting licences to hunters and others lies with the Minister for the Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht

Affairs (DAHRRGA) under the Wildlife Acts. In addition, control of deer on private property is the responsibility of landowners. Of course, landowners who have concerns regarding deer may engage in hunting deer during the annual open season subject to securing appropriate licences. Permissions under Section 42 of the Wildlife Acts, offer a facility outside of the annual open season whereby a person can obtain a permit, on a case-by-case basis, to prevent serious damage caused by individual deer on specific lands. Permissions are issued by DAHRRGA where there is evidence of such damage.

My Department does conduct post-mortems of deer primarily for Veterinary Public Health reasons under EU Regulation (EC) No 854/2004 laying down rules for the organisation of official controls on products of animal origin intended for human consumption. In that respect, submissions are typically received involving a set of lungs or a head +/- lungs and in 2017 tissues were received as routine submissions from 101 wild deer, of which culture results are pending for 24 and of the 77 deer for which testing is complete, *Mycobacterium bovis* has been isolated from 14. The county breakdown for culture positive deer is Wexford (4), Wicklow (7), Waterford (1), Dublin (1) and Cork (1). I am informed that there have not been any submissions from wild deer in Kerry in 2015, 2016 or 2017.

The Deputy should be aware that no definitive link has been established between deer and TB outbreaks on farms. Research has demonstrated that the primary underlying drivers of bovine TB in Ireland are its spread within cattle populations, its spread within badger populations and cross-infection between these two populations. Therefore, as part of its TB Eradication Strategy my Department operates a wildlife programme which involves reducing the badger populations in infected areas, where badgers are deemed to be a risk factor, and vaccination of badgers now forms part of that programme. This Strategy is achieving results, given that there has been a significant improvement in the disease situation in Ireland where the incidence of TB in cattle has fallen by almost 40% since 2008 and is currently at record low levels. However given trends such as that in Kerry where herd incidence has risen from 2.06% this time last year to 4.08% which is higher than the national average of 2.58%, we cannot be complacent. My Department is continuing to seek the best methods available to assist in reaching our goal of eradicating TB by 2030.

Basic Payment Scheme Eligibility

163. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a matter regarding a cut to the BPS payment of a person (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3729/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted an application under the Force Majeure measure of the Single Payment Scheme on 05th February 2004.

Following examination of this application, my Department deemed this application unsuccessful as it did not satisfy the criteria laid down in Article 40 of Council Regulation EC No 1782/2003, determining Force Majeure/Exceptional Circumstances.

The person named subsequently appealed this decision to the Independent Single Payment Appeals Committee who having re-examined all aspects of the case recommended that the original decision taken by my Department should be upheld.

As the person named has explored all avenues in relation to their Force Majeure application this case is considered closed.

Transfer of Entitlements Application

164. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a matter (details supplied) regarding entitlements will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3736/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named submitted three Transfer of Entitlement applications to transfer entitlements by way of lease under the 2017 Basic Payment Scheme. Two of the transfers have been fully processed but the third transfer remains outstanding as the transferee did not have a herd number and the transfer could not be processed. My Department has been in contact with this transferee and have been informed that the allocation of the herdnumber is in process.

Upon allocation of this herd number and following processing of the transferees 2017 Basic Payment scheme application the third transfer received from the person named will be processed. This will enable the activation of all the entitlements for the person named thus avoiding the risk of entitlements being lost to the National Reserve due to non-usage.

The person named has 51.67 entitlements in total. In 2017 he activated 29 and leased out entitlements under 3 transfer applications as follows

Transfer 1: 3.67 entitlements leased out for one year

Transfer 2: 5 entitlements leased out for one year

Transfer 3: 14 entitlements leased out for one year

GLAS Payments

165. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will receive outstanding GLAS payments for 2016 and 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3743/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 2 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016 and has received the 85% advance payment in respect of the 2016 scheme year.

The Department is aware of an issue with this case regarding the payment of the 2016 GLAS balance and the 2017 advance. A solution has been identified and is being implemented. GLAS 2017 advance payments are continuing to issue on a weekly basis.

GLAS Payments

166. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a GLAS 2 payment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3768/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 2 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016. Payments in respect of the 2016 scheme year have been made.

Validation checks must be passed on all actions on GLAS claims and all cases must clear

these checks before payment can issue. Department officials are working proactively to complete these checks on all claims to allow for the issue of payments. Once this case clears validations the 2017 advance payment will be made. GLAS payments are continuing to issue on a weekly basis.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

167. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason the single farm payment for a person (details supplied) has not been issued; and when this payment will issue. [3770/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application under the Basic Payment Scheme was received from the person named on 28th April 2017. Advance and balancing payments issued on schedule to the nominated bank account in October and December 2017.

GLAS Payments

168. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a GLAS 2 payment for a person (details supplied) has not been issued in view of the fact that the person signed up in November 2015 and was informed that the issue pertaining to commonage had been waived. [3771/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named was approved into GLAS 2 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016.

An issue arose with this application relating to a commonage action. The issue is being addressed at the moment. Payment will issue as soon as the case is finalised. Payments are issuing on an ongoing weekly basis.

Animal Welfare

169. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the action he plans to take to ban fox hunting. [3772/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 requires persons to ensure that animals been hunted are not subject to unnecessary suffering and specifically prohibits the hunting of animals which have been released in an injured, mutilated or exhausted condition.

Voluntary codes of practice have been established by The Hunting Association of Ireland which detail the conduct to be adhered to in respect of the hunting of foxes and the treatment of the animal during the hunt. The Code prohibits the hunting of foxes where the animal is injured and advocates the humane disposal of a fox when captured. The code also takes into account local concerns and the concerns of the landowner(s) on which hunting takes place.

While I have no plans to ban fox hunting, I have however recently asked officials of my Department to engage with the Hunting Association to determine whether the existing Code needs updating.

Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme Data

170. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the loans made available to persons through the agriculture cashflow support loan scheme to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3785/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): One of my priorities is to support the provision of lower-cost, more flexible finance for farmers. The “Agriculture Cashflow Support Loan Scheme” was developed by my Department in co-operation with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) to address the impact of the change in the sterling exchange rate arising from Brexit and lower commodity prices in some agriculture sectors during 2016. It made €150 million of flexible working capital funding available at low-cost interest rates of 2.95%. I launched the Scheme on 31 January 2017 and by the beginning of March, all of the participating banks had reported that their funds were committed.

The SBCI have reported that, to the 18th December 2017, there have been 4,200 loan draw-downs amounting to a total of €142,397,350. This is an average loan amount of €33,900. The last date for draw down of approved loans was the 31st December 2017 and the SBCI will report final figures for the Scheme shortly. I was pleased with the positive reaction to the Scheme by farmers, which among other things, allowed them to pay down more expensive forms of short-term debt, ensuring the ongoing financial sustainability of viable farming enterprises.

This successful Scheme has provided a template for publicly-assisted loan schemes and I expect to launch the new “Brexit Loan Scheme” shortly with the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation. This will make up to €300 million of working capital finance available to Irish businesses currently impacted by Brexit, or to those who will be in the future, with my Department’s funding (€9 million out of the total €23 million in public funding) ensuring at least 40% of the Scheme will be available to food companies.

Horse Racing Ireland

171. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether the appointment process for the position of chairperson of Horse Racing Ireland which becomes vacant on 18 March 2018 should comply with the revised and updated Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3815/18]

172. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if stateboards.ie will be used to source expressions of interest from persons when the position of chairperson of Horse Racing Ireland falls vacant on 18 March 2018 in order to ensure that the process of appointment meets and is in compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3816/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 171 and 172 together.

Horse Racing Ireland is a commercial state body responsible for the overall administration, promotion and development of the horse racing industry.

On 30 September 2014 the Government announced changes to the system for appointments to State Boards including that all appointments should be advertised on www.stateboards.ie, operated by the Public Appointments Service (PAS).

The Deputy will be aware that the Board has its own obligations in relation to compliance with corporate governance standards. My Department has arrangements in place to monitor the activities of State Bodies and ensure compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.

It is my understanding that the position will be advertised on www.stateboards.ie in the coming weeks.

Brexit Issues

173. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the €300 million Brexit loan scheme fund announced in budget 2018 will open for applications; the length of time the fund will remain open for applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3876/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Earlier this week I welcomed the signing of the counter guarantee agreement with the European Investment Fund that will facilitate the launch of the “Brexit Loan Scheme”. The Scheme will provide affordable, flexible financing to Irish businesses currently impacted by Brexit, or those who will be in the future, and will make up to €300 million of working capital finance available. Given their unique exposure to the UK market, funding from my Department (DAFM) ensures that at least 40% of the fund will be available to food businesses; DAFM is providing €9 million out of the total €23 million in public funding. The working capital finance will be easier to access, more competitively priced and at more favourable terms than current offerings. This will give Brexit-impacted businesses time and space to adapt and to grow into the future.

The Scheme will remain open for up to two years or until it has been fully drawn down and will be delivered by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI). They expect to announce their commercial lending partners shortly following an “Open Call” at the end of last year. Following the completion of administrative arrangements between SBCI and the commercial lending partners, I will be in a position to launch the new Scheme with my colleague the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

Brexit Issues

174. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the €25 million allocated in budget 2018 for the development of further Brexit response loan schemes for farmers, fishermen and food businesses in 2018 will open for applications; the length of time the fund will remain open for applications; the minimum and maximum amounts permitted to be loaned; the collateral requirements; if funds will be loaned to farmers for the purchase of livestock; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3877/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The successful “Agriculture Cashflow Loan Scheme” has provided a template for publicly-assisted loan schemes. This includes the “Brexit Loan Scheme”, which I expect to launch shortly with my colleague the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

I also announced in Budget 2018 that I had secured funding of €25 million for my Department to facilitate the development of potential Brexit response loan schemes for farmers, fishermen and for longer-term capital financing for food businesses. These are currently under active consideration and I will announce more details as they become available.

GLAS Data

175. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in receipt of GLAS 1, 2 and 3 that have received the 85% advance payment of their 2017 payment, by county, in tabular form; the number of persons that have passed all payment approval checks and are awaiting their 85% portion of 2017 payment; the number of GLAS recipients that have yet to receive this portion of payment, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3878/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested is being compiled and will be forwarded directly to the Deputy when it is available.

Fisheries Protection

176. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on proposals to harmonise EU legislation on fishing gears, bycatch rules and small catches (details supplied). [3879/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The proposal referred to by the Deputy concerns the conservation of fishery resources and the protection of marine ecosystems through technical measures.

Technical Conservation measures are rules on how, where and when fishermen may fish, also determining gear, catch composition and ways to deal with accidental catches. Up until now, these detailed and complex rules have been decided at EU level through a lengthy adoption process, and over the years this regulatory structure has become highly complex.

The aims of the proposal are to:

- Optimise the contribution of technical measures to achieving the key objectives of the new Common Fisheries Policy that came into force on 1 January 2014.
- Create the flexibility required to adjust technical measures by facilitating regionalised approaches (consistent with the objectives in Union law).
- Simplify the current rules in line with the Commission's REFIT programme (the European Commission's Regulatory Fitness and Performance programme). The new proposal replaces fully or partially nine co-decided Regulations, amends and simplifies five others, and repeals over 10 Commission Regulations.

The proposal largely retains the existing conservation standards, however it extends conservation to ecosystems (area closures and other technical limitations to avoid unwanted effects on the ecosystems or the sea bed), marine habitats (in particular in connection with environmental legislation such as the Habitat and the Marine Strategy Framework Directives), and non-commercial and sensitive by-catch species.

The proposal is being considered under the co-decision process whereby the Council and the European Parliament separately examine the proposal. Once both institutions have established their respective positions negotiations take place to try and agree a common final text. The Council agreed its general approach last summer – supported by Ireland- while the Parliament only concluded its deliberations last week.

Over the coming weeks and perhaps months, negotiations will take place between the two institutions on this very complex proposal.

We are analysing the EU Parliament amendments with a view to making clear the issues of concern and the elements that we can support.

My officials and I are working, in close consultation with industry stakeholders, to try to ensure that any final agreement is practicable, sensible and will facilitate rather than hinder the industry in reaching our common objective of sustainable and profitable fisheries.

Sea Lice Controls

177. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the systems in place to address the threat of sea lice to wild salmon on farms. [3880/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In Ireland the control of sea lice is managed by the Marine Institute on behalf of the State. These protocols are more advanced than those operated in other jurisdictions for the following reasons:

- The inspection regime is totally independent of the industry.
- Data obtained as a result of inspection is published and made widely available.
- Treatment trigger levels are set at a low level.

The sea lice monitoring and control programme in Ireland has been acknowledged by the Environment Directorate (DG Environment) of the EU Commission as representing international best practice.

Food Marketing Programme

178. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department or Bord Bia has analysed marketing regarding nomadic meat in the UK; and the policy options to progress this issue and increase live exports. [3881/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The labelling of food in the European Union is governed by a number of regulations which lay down strict requirements in relation to mandatory country of origin labelling for certain meats.

Under these rules, labels on meat from cattle born and reared in the Republic of Ireland, exported live to Northern Ireland and subsequently slaughtered there must include the member state of birth and rearing and the member state of slaughter. The possibility of a voluntary all-Island label has been raised with British retailers, who have reiterated their longstanding policy of marketing British and Irish beef separately, with a simple, clear origin label.

I am very conscious of the vital role that live exports play in stimulating price competition and providing an alternative market outlet for farmers. My Department and Bord Bia are involved in on-going work to encourage and facilitate such exports. Last February, my Department reduced the veterinary inspection fee payable on live exports of calves under three months of age to €1.20 per animal from €4.80 in order to bring greater equity in the fees payable per consignment in respect of calves, weanlings and adult cattle.

The cattle export trade in 2017 was positive after two years of decline. At year's end, ex-

ports of live cattle had increased by over 43,000 head, or 30%, in comparison to 2016. I will continue to work to ensure that Irish meat and livestock producers have the option of exporting to markets abroad for both processed meat and live animals.

Common Agricultural Policy Reform

179. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on recent policy statements by President Macron's administration (details supplied) regarding deep reform of CAP at EU level and prioritising other policy areas; and his further views on whether this represents a potential shift in policy of defending the current CAP budget from a long term member state advocate. [3883/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is currently reviewing the CAP Communication published by the European Commission in November 2017, in advance of legislative provisions to be presented by the Commission in mid 2018. It is also expected that Multi Annual Financial Framework proposals will be presented in May 2018.

The CAP binds the members of the European Union in a collective commitment to food security, environmental sustainability, and the protection of farm families and rural communities. My officials have and will continue to engage with officials in all Member States including France with whom we have a deep and long lasting relationship.

I look forward to working with the institutions of the European Union and with all my Ministerial colleagues including France to deliver the best possible Common Agricultural Policy for the citizens of the European Union into the future.

Pigmeat Sector

180. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the return pig farmers are receiving for their produce from processors, with farmers being paid below the cost of production. [3884/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am keenly aware of how resilient pig farmers have been in recent years and in their ability to sustain their businesses in an often volatile price environment.

Price volatility is an ongoing challenge for the sector and developments over the last couple of years simply serve to emphasise the cyclical nature of prices in the industry. Following a particularly tough 2015 prices hit a five-year low early in 2016 before embarking on an upward trajectory which saw prices reach a three-year high during July 2017.

While prices across the EU have slipped back somewhat recently - primarily driven by a fall in demand from China - my Department has made a particular effort to support market diversification for the sector over recent years. The importance of this is well illustrated by the dramatic expansion in Ireland's pigmeat exports to Asia, and to China in particular, in recent years. And of course the uncertainty around Brexit lends an even greater importance to trade promotion in international markets.

In June 2017 I visited Mexico, now the fourth largest global importer of chilled and frozen pork. With Mexican demand for pork continuing to grow I have made gaining access to that market a priority. I also travelled to Japan and South Korea last autumn where I promoted

the development of further opportunities for Irish producers in these jurisdictions as I want to continue to diversify the range markets to which Ireland has access.

With Irish production up almost 1% in 2017 and export value increasing some 14% to an estimated €712m I have every hope that we can continue to work with the sector and continue to take advantage of international market opportunities for Irish pigmeat.

Fodder Crisis

181. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the transport subsidy scheme he recently announced; when it will open for applications; and his plans to bring forward a meal voucher scheme. [3885/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I am fully aware that the wet weather conditions of much of last autumn, coupled with the need to house livestock earlier than normal resulted in pressure on fodder supplies, with consequent shortfalls in some parts of the West and North West of the country.

Through feedback from work I asked Teagasc to undertake locally and the views returned from the two meetings of the Fodder Group I convened last December, it is clear that the more significant shortfalls in winter fodder supplies while very real, are geographically confined and localised. While I believe that fodder remains available across the country, I am nevertheless conscious that a key issue to resolve is the cost of transporting fodder between those areas where it is available and those where it is scarce.

To address this problem I am introducing a Fodder Transport Support measure to provide additional assistance to those livestock farmers most severely affected by the prolonged wet weather of last autumn, mainly in parts of the West and North West and we are partnering with the co-operatives on this.

Farmers, who have an identified fodder shortage, having completed a fodder budgeting exercise with their agricultural advisor, will be eligible to receive a financial contribution towards offsetting the costs of transport of fodder in excess of 100 km. As fodder is traded between farms on a regular basis, it is essential that the support measure is targeted at those who most need it and does not impact on the normal functioning of the market for fodder and for this reason a minimum transport distance applies. Eligible applicants will receive a transport contribution of €8 per standard bale of hay or straw for feeding, and €12 per standard bale of silage or haylage, applicable only to the verified shortfall in fodder.

Financial assistance under the Fodder Transport Support Measure is payable in accordance with Commission Regulation (EU) No. 1408/2013 on de minimis aid in the agricultural production sector.

While this measure builds on my early supports to farmers through prioritisation of farm payments, and the convening of a Fodder Group, I urge affected farmers to avail of the additional fodder budgeting support being provided by Teagasc.

Application forms and further details on the operation of the measure will be available from my Department in the coming days.

National Broadband Plan Implementation

182. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if an issue (details supplied) regarding the roll-out of fibre broadband will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3716/18]

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 2017 I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan (NBP).

The Map is 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 rollout 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 is 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 26th September 2017 are being evaluated by the NBP specialist team. This is the last stage of the procurement process before moving to the final tender stage, which will be followed by the appointment of a preferred bidder(s) and contract signature.

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 area 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.

With regards to the rollout close to referenced premises, decisions made by private telecommunication operators relating to the rollout 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.

In the interim, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department's website

Waste Disposal Charges

183. **Deputy Noel Greally** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if extra allowances will be provided to parents with children with special needs, especially persons with incontinent children in relation to the proposed pay-by-weight bin charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3727/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): In line with the commitments set out in *A Resource Opportunity - Waste Management Policy in Ireland*, published in 2012, and in the interest of encouraging further waste prevention and greater recycling, flat-rate fees for kerbside household waste collection are being phased out over the period autumn 2017 to autumn 2018, as customers contracts come up for renewal. The necessary regulatory steps have been put in place to give effect to this measure. It is worth noting that this measure is not 'new' for about half of kerbside household waste customers, who are already on an incentivised usage pricing plan, i.e., a plan which contains a per lift or weight related fee.

As announced in mid-2017, mandatory per kilogramme 'pay by weight' charging is not being introduced. Allowing for a range of charging options, which encourage householders to reduce and separate their waste, provides flexibility to waste collectors to develop various service-price offerings that suit different household circumstances. Consequently, a pure kilogramme charge for waste collection may not be selected by some households. Instead, some households may use a 'per lift' type charge or a 'weight allowance' collection service.

An annual support of €75 will be introduced as soon as possible this year and made available for persons with lifelong or long-term medical incontinence. This will help people meet the average annual cost of disposal of medical incontinence products. My Department is in discussion with the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive with a view to finalising the details and arrangements of the support as soon as possible, following further consultation with stakeholder groups.

Broadband Service Speeds

184. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to improve broadband availability in Glascom, Rathconrath, County Westmeath; if so, when they will be rolled out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3791/18]

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 2017 I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area under the National Broadband Plan (NBP).

The Map is 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 rollout high speed broadband to 300,000 premises by the end of 2018 as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with me in April.

There are 52 premises in the townland of Glascarn. 47 premises (90%) fall within the AMBER area and will be covered under the State led Intervention while 5 (10%) are LIGHT BLUE and fall to be covered by eir's planned rural deployment.

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 26th September are being evaluated by the NBP specialist team. This is the last stage of the procurement process before moving to the final tender stage, which will be followed by the appointment of a preferred bidder(s) and contract signature.

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 rollout by the end of 2018. Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eircode-lookup/> A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie.

In the interim, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department's website.

Telecommunications Infrastructure

185. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to a reply from a company (details supplied), his plans to provide for flexibility in cases in which small sections of certain roads are not included in the roll-out of fibre broadband. [3792/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naugh-

ten): Decisions made by private telecommunication operators relating to the rollout 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. Premises where commercial providers are not currently delivering or have indicated no plans to deliver high speed broadband services will be addressed through the National Broadband Plan State led Intervention.

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 26th September 2017 are being evaluated by the NBP specialist team. This is the last stage of the procurement process before moving to the final tender stage, which will be followed by the appointment of a preferred bidder(s) and contract signature.

I fully recognise the importance of availability of high speed connectivity for all premises in Ireland, including those in Mullingar, 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 area 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 Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department’s website

Dublin Bus

186. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to changes being made to the proposed timing of the handover of Dublin Bus routes to a company (details supplied); if this is now taking place sooner than originally suggested; if so, the reason for the changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3748/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy’s question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Driver Test Waiting Lists

187. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a driving test for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [3755/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Public Transport

188. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he is taking to address the significant overcrowding issues that are ongoing on the Luas; and his plans to add to the capacity of the Luas, particularly on the cross city lines. [3793/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, including the light rail Luas network.

Passenger numbers on both lines of the Luas network increased by over 10% to 37.6 million in 2017. With the Green Line now extended to Broombridge, and providing interchange with the Red Line and greater connectivity to rail services, those numbers are likely to grow substantially again in 2018. While it is welcomed that so many new customers are using the extended Green Line, it has meant that some trams are operating at capacity.

As part of the Luas Cross City project seven new 55 metre-long trams have been ordered to increase capacity on the Green Line. The first of these new trams is expected to be in service next month and the remainder will be delivered and become operational over the next few months.

In addition, the Green Line Capacity Enhancement project was recently approved by Government. The purpose of the project is to address current capacity limits at peak hours on the Luas Green Line and to cater for future demands along the line. The project is proposed in the National Transport Authority's (NTA) Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035.

The project will cost approximately €90 million and it includes the lengthening of the 26 existing Green line trams from 43 metres to 55 metres and the purchase of a further 8 new 55 metre-long trams which will greatly increase the passenger capacity of the fleet now and to meet future passenger demand. The capacity increases at peak periods provided by the project will assist in reducing crowding on the Green Line and enhance accessibility for mobility and sensory impaired users during these periods.

Additionally the Green Line Infrastructure Upgrade, an investment project to lengthen the platforms at the Green Line stations, was also completed towards the end of last year.

Rail Services Provision

189. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether there is potential for Irish Rail to increase the frequency of service along certain rail lines, particularly those that are serving regular commuters and-or have seat shortages; and if not, the reason therefor. [3794/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is

a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) in conjunction with Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Rail Services Provision

190. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the process by which his Department plans for changes in passenger demand for rail services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3795/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Aviation Industry

191. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to the advices provided in the notice dated 11 December 2017 sent by the European Commission to the Commission for Aviation Regulation, the reason the PSO licence for the Kerry to Dublin and the Donegal to Dublin routes has been awarded to an airline that will lose its EU operating licence; when the PSO routes will be re-tendered in advance of the UK leaving the EU in March 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3801/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The new PSO contract to operate the air routes linking the airports in Donegal and Kerry with Dublin for the next four years was awarded to Stobart Air UC following an EU public procurement process. Stobart fulfilled all the current necessary requirements including holding a valid Air Operator Certificate and a valid Operating Licence.

The situation in the aviation sector post Brexit, including any transition period, is obviously unclear at this stage and the notice of December last from the European Commission, to which the Deputy refers, was directed at air carriers, reminding them of the implications arising from the current EU rules applicable to air transport. Essentially, the notice amounts to a call to all air carriers holding an EU operating licence to make appropriate preparations for Brexit, in the event that EU rules in the field of aviation no longer apply to the United Kingdom following their withdrawal from the European Union.

Road Tolls

192. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if all persons overcharged on the M1 toll at Drogheda will be refunded; if a full investigation will take place; if the toll operator will be fined; and if it will ensure that overcharging does not recur. [3817/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy in relation to roads. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects on national roads are a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the relevant local authority. For regional and local roads it is a matter for each respective local au-

thority. More specifically, the statutory powers to levy tolls on national roads as well as regional and local roads, to make toll bye-laws and to enter into toll agreements with private investors are vested in TII (for national roads) and each local authority (for regional and local roads) under Part V of the Roads Act 1993 (as amended by the Planning and Development Act 2000 and the Roads Act 2007). Noting the above, I am referring the question to TII for direct reply within 10 working days. Please inform my private office if you do not receive the information.

Driver Licences

193. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the date a person (details supplied) was issued with a full drivers licence by the appropriate driving licencing authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3843/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): This is a matter for the Road Safety Authority. I have referred the question to the Authority for direct reply. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Parking Provision

194. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if coaches will be able to park overnight in the coach park soon to open in the docks area if parked in advance of the 7 p.m entry deadline; and if not, the facilities that exist in Dublin for overnight coach parking. [3875/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The provision of the North Wall Coach Park is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA), which has statutory responsibility for the development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA)

The purpose of providing a new coach park at North Wall was, in part, to address the issue of on-street parking of coaches in the city centre, particularly with regard to the Luas Cross City works and route.

I am advised that a grant of permission with a number of conditions was issued by An Bord Pleanála in May 2016 in which the NTA obtained 5 year temporary planning permission allowing operation of the coach park from 7.00am to 7.00pm Monday to Friday, with occasional use only up to 12.00 am (midnight) and on weekends for special events.

With regards to other facilities for overnight coach parking, this is a matter for the relevant Local Authority in the first instance.

In light of their responsibility in this matter, I have referred the Deputy's question to the National Transport Authority for a direct response. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Early Childhood Care and Education

195. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of a child vis-a-vis access to the ECCE scheme that will reach three years of age on 18 January 2019. [3765/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme is a universal free pre-school programme available to all children within the eligible age range. It provides children with their first formal experience of early learning prior to commencing primary school. The programme provides for three hours per day, five days per week over 38 weeks per year (averaging at a total of 61 weeks) and the programme year runs from September to June.

Eligibility under this programme currently commences from the entry point following a child reaching age 3 years. From September 2018 eligibility will commence from the entry point following the date when the child reaches age 2 years and 8 months and will expand to 76 weeks/two pre-school years.

In the example referred to by the Deputy the child will be 2 years and 7 months on commencement of the 2018-19 programme year in September 2018 so the earliest date of eligibility for the ECCE programme will be September 2019 with full entitlement to two pre-school years.

Departmental Funding

196. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the status of funding for an archive (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3702/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): Under section 80 of the Local Government Act 2001, the cost of purchasing, managing and maintaining local records and archives is a matter for local authorities.

My Department has no role in this regard, nor does it have funding available to provide to Kerry County Council for the purchase of the archival material in question.

Communities Facilities Scheme Funding

197. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if grant assistance is available to a facility (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3711/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): My Department oversees the national €2 million Communities Facilities Scheme. The Communities Facilities Scheme is targeted at both urban and rural areas and funds projects that seek to enhance communities, address disadvantage and improve social cohesion at a local level. It can potentially fund capital purchases such as that outlined in the Deputy's question.

The 2017 scheme is currently closed to applications but the 2018 scheme will be launched in Quarter 2 of 2018. The Communities Facilities Scheme is managed at a local level by the Local Community Development Committees in conjunction with the Municipal Districts, under the remit of the local authorities. Details regarding how to apply for funding will be available on the Department's website at www.drcd.gov.ie once the 2018 scheme has been launched.

Departmental Reports

198. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social

Protection the person or body that researched and composed the report by her Department, chronic fatigue syndrome version 5; the costs involved; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3752/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Fifteen clinical protocols for use by Medical Assessors (MAs) of the Medical Review and Assessment Service (MRAS) were developed as part of the Medical Review and Case Management (MRCM) Project, 2010. This was part of the requirement to redefine the clinical work processes of the MAs and develop medical protocols taking into account evidence-based best practice in order to increase the consistency in conducting assessments.

The protocol, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Version 5. was produced by Atos Healthcare in association with BearingPoint Management and Technology Consultants, and the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The protocol was externally reviewed by Professor Sir Mansel Aylward.

The overall cost was €285,496.

Data Sharing Arrangements

199. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the social welfare services office is allowed to share the personal data of a person with the social welfare appeals office in circumstances in which no formal notice of an appeal has been lodged and in which the person has not given explicit consent for data sharing. [3762/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office is an Office of my Department which, under social welfare legislation, is independent in its decision-making.

Under social welfare law, decisions on entitlement to payments are made by a Deciding Officer (DO), based on the evidence and information provided by the person applying for the payment.

Where a DO decides that a person is not entitled to a payment and further evidence is subsequently submitted to the Department, this evidence is normally accepted as being a request for a review or an appeal of the DO's decision.

Legislation does provide that a Deciding Officer can refer a case directly to the Social Welfare Appeals Office and that, where such a referral is made, it should be treated by the Social Welfare Appeals Office as if it were an appeal by the applicant.

Where a DO accepts further evidence as being a request for an appeal, that evidence is forwarded to the Social Welfare Appeals Office. The intention in such cases is to ensure that the person's entitlements are determined as efficiently as possible.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Humanitarian Assistance Scheme

200. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if grant assistance is available for a facility (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3709/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government is the lead Department for severe weather emergencies and the Office of Public Works has responsibility for capital flood relief activities. My Department has an important role to play in assisting 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. Since summer 2017 the scheme has provided financial support to households following flooding in counties Donegal, Laois and most recently in Galway.

The scheme does not provide assistance towards the funding of a generator in the event of a power loss due to severe weather.

I would suggest that the Deputy follows up with the appropriate authority responsible for funding the sheltered living housing facility.

Social Insurance Fund

201. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the scheme which allows self employed persons to claim the invalidity pension can be backdated in circumstances (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3725/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Government is committed to encouraging self-employment and entrepreneurship and this includes improving the level of PRSI based benefits available to self-employed people while ensuring the sustainability of the social insurance fund.

Self-employed contributors have been eligible for the invalidity pension from December 2017. For the first time, this has given the self-employed access to the safety-net of State income supports if they become permanently incapable of work as a result of an illness or disability without having to go through a means test. When deciding to extend access to this benefit to the self-employed, Government wanted to ensure that it was on a similar basis to that of those in employment. This is a real advance in the level of cover available to the self-employed.

To qualify for an Invalidity Pension from the Department, a self-employed person or employee must have 260 PRSI paid contributions (Class A, E, H or S) since they started paying social insurance and 48 PRSI paid or credited contributions (Class A, E, H or S) in the last complete contribution year or the second last contribution year before the date of their claim. This is a legislative requirement and contributions outside of the reference period cannot be assessed for the purposes of establishing the required 48 paid or credited contributions.

A person, with the required 260 paid PRSI contributions, applying for Invalidity Pension in 2018 must therefore have 48 paid or credited contributions in either 2016 or 2017 to meet the contribution conditions of the scheme.

In line with the original objective of this measure, any proposed changes to the current scheme conditions would have to be considered for other social insurance contributors including employed contributors. Therefore, any changes on the lines proposed would be expected to have significant financial implications and any decision to improve these provisions would be a

matter for Government to consider in the context of the Budget.

I hope this clarifies the issue for the deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

202. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the conditions that must be met in order for self employed persons to receive the State pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3730/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Entitlement to state pension (contributory) is assessed on the basis of an applicant's social insurance record and satisfaction of the eligibility conditions applicable on the date they reach pension age.

Current social welfare legislation provides that, in order to qualify for state pension (contributory), an applicant must have entered insurable employment before attaining the age of 56 years, have at least 520 full rate paid contribution weeks since entry into insurance and have a yearly average of at least 10 paid and/or credited contributions from the applicant's date of entry into insurable employment to the end of the tax year preceding their 66th birthday. Where an applicant becomes self-employed on 6 April 1988 and at any time before that date was an employed contributor, the more favourable date of their entry into insurance or 6 April 1988 is taken as their date of entry.

In addition to the qualifying conditions above, a self-employed applicant must have paid self-employment contributions in respect of at least one contribution year prior to reaching age 66 and all self-employment contributions payable must have been paid in full.

Legislation providing for a half rate state pension contributory for self employed persons came into effect from 9 April 1999 to benefit those already over 56 years of age when compulsory self-employed social insurance was introduced in 1988 and who had not paid other contribution types to satisfy the condition of having entered insurance 10 years before pension age. This pension requires a minimum of 5 years (260 full-rate) contributions and is payable at 50% of the standard rate.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Schemes Data

203. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons listed as self employed that are in receipt of social welfare payments, in tabular form. [3731/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The distinction between 'self-employed' and 'employed' does not form part of the eligibility criteria for most social welfare payments.

Five schemes where self-employment status is directly relevant to payment eligibility are:

1. People with a previous or continuing self-employed status on Jobseeker's Allowance;
2. Farm Assist, where it is a condition of payment that the recipient is actively engaged in

farming on their own behalf;

3. Fish Assist, where the recipient must be engaged in fishing;
4. Short-term Enterprise Allowance;
5. Back to Work Enterprise Allowance.

In respect of those payments, the information requested by the Deputy is detailed in the attached tabular statement.

Recipient of an unemployment social welfare payment where self-employed status is relevant to eligibility, at the end of December 2017

Payment Type	Recipients
Jobseekers Allowance with previous or continuing self-employment	7,614
Farm Assist	7,234
Fish Assist	66
Short-Term Enterprise Allowance	351
Back to Work Enterprise Allowance	9,655

Social Insurance Fund

204. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the legislation that was in place in 1984 regarding married women signing for unemployment assistance; if the case of a person (details supplied) will be investigated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3735/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The purpose of PRSI credited contributions (“credits”) is to secure the social welfare benefits and pensions of PRSI contributors by covering gaps in insurance on the occasions where they are not in a position to make contributions such as periods of unemployment, illness etc.

The Social Welfare (Contributions) Regulations 1953 (S.I. No. 5 of 1953) (as amended) was the relevant Statutory Instrument governing PRSI contributions in 1984. These Regulations were superseded by the Social Welfare (Consolidated Contributions and Insurability) Regulations 1996 (S.I.No.312 of 1996) (as amended).

The 1953 Regulations did not prevent married women from signing for credits for unemployment assistance. The same arrangements were in place for men and women whether married or single.

In cases where the Department has an incomplete record or no record of a person’s social insurance contribution history, including credits, the person can provide information in this regard to have the situation corrected. To do this they should submit their information and evidence to the Department for consideration to the address below.

PRSI Records,

Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, McCarter’s Road,

Ardaravan,

Buncrana,

Donegal.

Disability Allowance Appeals

205. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an appeal for a disability allowance by a person (detail supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3745/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 11th January 2018. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these papers have been received from the Department, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral appeal hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Offices

206. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the Castlepollard social welfare branch office is to be closed; her plans in relation to this office; and if services will be delivered to the population of north County Westmeath into the future. [3756/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department currently has 58 Social Welfare Branch Offices at various locations throughout the country. Each Branch Office is operated and managed, under a contract for services, by a Branch Manager who is required to act as an agent for the Department in the area served by the office.

The contract for the delivery of contracted Branch Office services in Castlepollard is due to expire on the 9th of February 2018, and the Department is considering options for the delivery of services in this area.

Disability Allowance Eligibility

207. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a disability allowance payment has not been made to a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3757/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Based on the evidence supplied in support of their application for disability allowance (DA), this person’s application was disallowed on the grounds that the medical qualifying condition was not satisfied. They were notified in writing of this decision on 20 May 2017.

The person concerned requested an appeal of the decision and submitted additional medical evidence for consideration. The Social Welfare Appeals Office decided, based on this additional evidence, that the medical qualifying condition was satisfied.

DA is a means-tested payment. On 22 January 2018 the person concerned was asked to supply supporting documentation in relation to their means. This information is required by the deciding officer in order to make a decision on their eligibility. On receipt of this information a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Appeals

208. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the social welfare services office on receipt of additional documentation in support of a disability allowance claim (details supplied) treats the supply of additional supporting documentation as formal notice of an appeal of the decision and forward a person's file to the social welfare appeals office for a decision. [3763/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Under social welfare law, decisions on entitlement to payments such as disability allowance are made by a Deciding Officer (DO), based on the evidence and information provided by the person applying for the payment.

The decision of a DO can only be revised in certain circumstances. Where a DO decides that a person is not entitled to a payment and further evidence is subsequently submitted to the Department, this evidence is normally accepted as being a request for a review or an appeal of the DO's decision.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office is an Office of my Department which, under social welfare legislation, is independent in its decision-making. However, Legislation does provide that a Deciding Officer can refer a case directly to the Social Welfare Appeals Office and that, where such a referral is made, it should be treated by the Social Welfare Appeals Office as if it were an appeal by the applicant.

Where a DO accepts further evidence as being a request for an appeal, that evidence is forwarded to the Social Welfare Appeals Office. The intention in such cases is to ensure that the person's entitlements are determined as efficiently as possible.

The appeals process subsequently involves the preparation of a submission by the DO and this submission, along with the applicant's file, is forwarded to the SWAO for their decision on the matter.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

Local Employment Service

209. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons referred to the local employment service in 2016 and 2017, by county. [3823/18]

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

expansion of the department's activation capacity with the introduction of JobPath and the welcome reduction in the live register has allowed the department over the last two years to develop the activation service provided by the Local Employment Services (LES) across 12 Counties.

In 2016, LES providers were asked to increase the frequency with which they engage with activation jobseekers to enhance the quality of the services they provide. To facilitate this more intensive engagement, the Department reduced the number of people referred to the LES for the purpose of reducing caseloads so as to maintain a maximum caseload 120:1 per case officer

The LES were also requested to increase the time they allocate to work with each individual jobseeker and in 2017 bands were introduced with set engagement patterns so that a LES case officer with 101-120 clients would be expected to have monthly meetings with the clients, 81-100 clients every three weeks and 80 or fewer client every two weeks.

Smaller caseloads are key to providing the one to one intensive type of engagement which long term unemployed clients benefit from most.

It is important to note that 2016 was a year of transition for the LES from the previous model of engagement to the new one; they were still in the process of reducing their caseload with some clients rolling over from 2015. In order to reduce the pressure at some LES locations to enable them to provide the more intensive service requested, a lower number of clients were registered in 2016 to meet the overall caseloads requirements. Following this transition period, the 2017 referral numbers are maintaining a maximum case load of 120 to each case officer.

The table lists the total new registrations for each County for 2016 and 2017.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

New Registrations (attended) All Clients

County	2016	2017
Cork	529	1162
Dublin	10332	9812
Galway	282	431
Kerry	814	1005
Kildare	1114	1469
Limerick	672	1403
Louth	915	1268
Mayo	632	501
Monaghan	505	368
Waterford	327	1343
Wexford	447	1255
Wicklow	135	528
	16704	20545

JobPath Data

210. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount paid to Jobpath providers in 2017. [3824/18]

211. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons referred to Jobpath since its commencement; the number that gained full-time and part-time employment as a direct result of Jobpath; and the sectors in which em-

ployment was gained. [3825/18]

212. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons that have been released from Jobpath having not gained employment since its commencement. [3826/18]

215. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons engaged in Jobpath since its commencement that have had their jobseeker's payment either reduced or suspended. [3829/18]

216. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of Turas Nua and Seotec offices here; the year each office began providing the Jobpath service; and the corresponding number of times each office has been inspected since jobpath commenced. [3830/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 210 to 212, inclusive,, 215 and 216 together.

JobPath is a payment by results model and all set-up and day-to-day operational costs are borne by the companies. The companies are paid on the basis of performance and with the exception of the initial registration fee; payments are made only when a client has achieved sustained employment. The overall cost of JobPath will be determined by the number of people who participate in the programme and the number who get sustainable jobs.

It is not intended to publish the individual payments to the JobPath companies as these are commercially sensitive and to do so would place the State at a disadvantage both in terms of the contracts currently in place and in any future procurement that may be undertaken.

The total of fees claimed by the JobPath providers in 2017 was €58.5m.

JobPath has been designed to support persons who are long term unemployed and at the end of December 2017 some 141,000 jobseekers have commenced engagement with the service. Of these 52% were unemployed for more than three years and a further 12% have been unemployed for more than two years.

In relation to the number of participants to find employment and the number to complete their engagement period with the service without finding employment, it is important to note that jobseekers may be supported through the service for up to 30 months. During this time they have access to a Personal Advisor (PA) who works with them over two phases. In the first phase, of 12 months duration, the PA provides practical assistance in searching, preparing for, securing and sustaining employment. The second phase starts if the jobseeker is successful in finding work and the PA continues to work with the jobseeker for a further period of at least three months, and up to 12 months. In addition to these two phases jobseekers may also undertake training while on JobPath and this may extend the period for up to a further 6 months.

It will therefore take time to accumulate a sufficient number of clients (who have completed their engagement period with the service) for complete and robust outcome data to be available.

The Department has published initial cohort reports on the performance of the service, the most recent of which was published on the 5th of January 2018 and is available on the department's website welfare.ie. at <http://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/JobPath-Performance-Report2017.pdf>.

This initial report, which is based on the first four cohorts of jobseekers to be referred only, indicates that of these Jobseekers, to date 18% have entered full time employment, 4% entered

part time employment and 3% became self-employed, giving a total employment outcome figure of 25%. In addition, the report noted that participants have a higher chance of securing and remaining in employment compared to non-participants with a similar duration of unemployment.

An initial analysis of the sectors in which participants found employment suggests that some of the most popular types of employment are within the construction, manufacturing, sales, clerical/administrative, food service, cleaning and customer service sectors.

Given the above, the department is undertaking an econometric review of this strand of its activation services, completion of the review is provisionally scheduled for the end of Q3, following which more detailed and robust statistics will be available.

At the end of December 2017, circa 93,000 clients were engaged with JobPath, of which 483 or 0.5% have a penalty rate applied to their claim. This figure is consistent with the overall level of penalty rates applied across all Job Seekers. In total since the JobPath service commenced, approximately 6,500 or 4.6% of the 141,000 clients who had engaged with the JobPath service (between July 2015 and December 2017) have had, at some point during their engagement period, a penalty rate applied to their payment.

It is important to note that JobPath providers do not apply or recommend the application of a penalty rate. They simply advise the Department if a jobseeker is failing to attend activation meetings. Officials in the Department then contact the Jobseeker and seek to arrange a meeting to discuss the matter directly with them. The application of penalty rates is entirely a matter for the Department and officials involved will take all relevant factors into account.

In the interests of natural justice, a jobseeker who fails to participate in the activation process, whether that is provided directly by the Intreo service or via any contracted service provider, is given both written and verbal warnings and an opportunity to comply before a reduced rate of payment is applied. Furthermore, Jobseekers can, through co-operation with the activation service of my Department, benefit from early re-instatement of the full rate of Jobseeker's payment. Jobseekers can also appeal the decision to apply a penalty rate through the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO).

The JobPath Agreements were signed with Turas Nua and Seetec on **5 June 2015**. The service is being delivered in two contract areas which were based on the Department's divisional structure. The contract areas are as follows:

- Seetec - West; Midlands North; North East; North West, Dublin Central; Dublin North; Dublin South.

- Turas Nua - Cork Central; South East; Mid-Leinster, Mid-West; South West; Midlands South.

The roll-out of the service commenced on **20 July 2015** on a "soft-launch" basis and completed in mid- 2016. All of the Department's Offices are referring clients to the service.

The total number of **service delivery locations is eighty-nine (89)**, comprising the following:

Full-Time	Part-Time	Outreach	Total
56	13	20	89

Service delivery locations/Number of Inspections:

TURAS NUA- Full-time Offices

Questions - Written Answers

Office	Year opened	Number of inspections
Bray	2015	1
Carlow	2015	1
Clonmel	2015	1
Cork	2015	1
Ennis	2015	1
Kilkenny	2015	1
Limerick	2015	1
Listowel	2015	1
Naas	2015	1
Newcastlewest	2015	1
Thurles	2015	1
Tralee	2015	1
Tullamore	2015	1
Waterford City	2015	1
Wexford	2015	1
Athy	2016	1
Dungarvan	2016	0
Enniscorthy	2016	0
Gorey	2016	1
Killarney	2016	1
Mallow	2016	1
Midleton	2016	1
Nenagh	2016	0
New Ross	2016	0
Portlaoise	2016	1
Roscrea	2016	1
Wicklow	2016	0
Total		22

TURAS NUA- Part-time Offices

Office	Year opened	Number of inspections
Arklow	2015	1
Cahirciveen	2015	1
Bandon	2016	0
Bantry	2016	0
Clonakilty	2016	0
Dingle	2016	1
Fermoy	2016	0
Kilrush	2016	0
Kinsale	2016	0
Macroom	2016	1
Skibbereen	2016	1
Thomastown	2016	0
Tipperary Town	2016	0
Total		5

Seetec- Full-time Offices

Office	Year opened	Number of inspections
Bishop Square	2015	1
Buncrana	2015	1
Cavan	2015	1
Castlebar	2015	1
Drogheda	2015	1
Dundalk	2015	1
Dungloe	2015	0
Finglas	2015	1
Galway	2015	1
Letterkenny	2015	1
Longford	2015	1
Mullingar	2015	1
Navan	2015	1
Swords	2015	1
Tallaght	2015	1
Amiens Street	2016	1
Athlone	2016	1
Balbriggan	2016	1
Blanchardstown	2016	1
Birr	2016	1
Carrick on Shannon	2016	1
Clondalkin	2016	0
Coolock	2016	1
Dun Laoghaire	2016	0
Edenderry	2016	1
Maynooth	2016	0
Monaghan	2016	1
Navan Road	2016	1
Sligo	2016	0
Total		24

Seetec- Outreach Offices

Office	Year opened	Number of inspections
Ballina	2015	0
Belmullet	2015	0
Clifden	2015	0
Loughrea	2015	0
Ballinasloe	2016	0
Ballyfermot	2016	0
Ballymun	2016	0
Ballyshannon	2016	0
Carrickmacross	2016	0
Castlerea	2016	0
Carraroe	2016	0
Donegal	2016	0
Dunfanaghy	2016	0
Kells	2016	0
Killybegs	2016	0

Office	Year opened	Number of inspections
Manorhamilton	2016	0
Roscommon	2016	0
Trim	2016	0
Tuam	2016	0
Tubbercurry	2016	0
Total		0

A total of 51 Inspections have been carried out to-date. Inspections may be notified or un-notified.

I hope this clarifies the matters for the Deputy.

Back to Education Allowance Data

213. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of the back to education allowance in each of the years 2015 to 2017. [3827/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The number of persons in receipt of Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) at the end of December in each of the years 2015 to 2017 is shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: BETA recipients 2015 - 2017

Year	Number of recipients (at end December)
2015	18,345
2016	14,386
2017	11,336

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Data

214. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons engaged in community employment in each of the years 2015 to 2017. [3828/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The table outlines the position in relation to the number of persons engaged in Community Employment as at the end of December for each year from 2015 to 2017.

Year	Participants	Supervisors	Total
2015	22,813	1,405	24,218
2016	22,356	1,377	23,733
2017	21,832	1,357	23,189

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Questions Nos. 215 and 216 answered with Question No. 210.

Child Benefit Payments

217. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when arrears of child benefit dating back to February 2017 will be issued in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3886/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned applied for child benefit for her 2 children on the 17th October 2017. The claim has been processed with payment was awarded from November 2017. She was notified of the decision on the 1st of December 2017 and payment, including payment in respect of any arrears due issued to her in January 2018.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Disability Allowance Eligibility

218. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason the constant pain and wearing of a bandage resulting in difficulty finding employment has been disregarded in the claim for disability allowance in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3900/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): The person concerned submitted an application for disability allowance (DA) on 28 July 2017. Their application, based upon all the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds as it was not found that they were substantially restricted in taking up employment.

The person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 23 November 2017 and was also notified of their right to request a review of this decision or to appeal it to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). No request for an appeal or review has been received.

If they do not wish to seek a review or to appeal the decision, they may re-apply for disability allowance.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

Disability Allowance Appeals

219. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when payment, including arrears of disability allowance, will be made in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3918/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Based on the evidence supplied in support of their application for disability allowance (DA), this person's application was disallowed on the grounds that the medical qualifying condition was not satisfied. They were notified in writing of this decision on 27 March 2017.

The person concerned requested an appeal of the decision and submitted additional medical evidence for consideration. The Social Welfare Appeals Office decided, based on this additional evidence, that the medical qualifying condition was satisfied.

DA is a means-tested payment. On 17 November 2017 the person concerned was asked to supply supporting documentation in relation to their means. This information is required by the

deciding officer in order to make a decision on their eligibility. The required information was not provided and his file was therefore forwarded to his local Social Welfare Inspector (SWI). The SWI will arrange to meet with the person in question as soon as possible.

A decision on his entitlement to DA will be made on receipt of the Social Welfare Inspector's report and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Illness Benefit Eligibility

220. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) qualifies for further support in view of the fact that they only receive €224 per week; if they will qualify for an invalidity pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3919/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Illness Benefit is a payment for people who cannot work due to illness and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions. For illness benefit claims made in 2017 the governing PRSI contribution year is 2015. The rate of payment depends on the person's level of earnings in the governing contribution year. Where the average weekly earnings are €300 or more, the personal rate of payment is €193. A graduated rate applies where the average weekly earnings are less than €300.

The person concerned made a claim to illness benefit which was registered in my Department on 1 December 2017. Based on their earnings in the governing year, 2015, the person concerned qualified for a graduated rate of illness benefit of €151.20. The person concerned was also due an increase of €83.00 in their payment in respect of their spouse/partner. Invalidity Pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay-related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions. To qualify for IP a claimant must have at least 260 (5 years) paid reckonable PRSI contributions since entering social insurance and 48 contributions paid or credited in the last complete contribution year before the date of their claim. Only PRSI classes A, E, H or S contributions are reckonable for IP purposes.

The person concerned should complete an Invalidity Pension application form. Disability Allowance is a means tested payment for persons who have a disability which is expected to last for at least twelve months. The person concerned has made an application for assistance under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme. Any person who is in receipt of a reduced rate illness benefit payment and where their income is insufficient to meet their needs, may be eligible for a top-up under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme. The person concerned will be notified when a decision has been made on this matter.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Child Benefit Eligibility

221. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when child benefit and child dependant allowance will be restored in respect of their second child in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3920/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned was in receipt of child benefit for 2 children until October 2017. Child benefit ceased for her older child from November 2017 as the child had reached his 18th birthday and this benefit is not payable to a child over age 18.

In relation to child dependent allowance, the person concerned was in receipt of full rate child dependant allowance on her disability allowance claim in respect of her son until his 18th birthday. This payment ceased on 31 October 2017. The Department has not received any request to have this allowance reviewed or confirmation of the child's attendance in full time education. It is open to the person concerned to provide this information and have her entitlement reviewed.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Planning Issues

222. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the way in which it is possible for a business (detail supplied) to operate without planning permission unimpeded by his Department or the local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3797/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My role, as Minister, in relation to the planning system is mainly to provide and update the legislative and policy guidance framework. The legislative framework comprises the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the Act) and the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001-2017.

With regard to policy guidance, my Department has issued a significant number of planning guidelines (available on the Department's website, www.housing.gov.ie) under section 28 of the Act which planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála are obliged to have regard to in the performance of their planning functions. The day-to-day operation of the planning system is, however, a matter for the planning authorities.

Under section 30 of the Act, as Minister, I am specifically precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to any particular case, including an enforcement issue, with which a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála is or may be concerned.

Under the planning legislation, enforcement of planning control is a matter for the local planning authority concerned which can take action if a development does not have the required permission, or where any conditions attached to a permission have not been complied with.

There are extensive enforcement provisions provided for in Part VIII of the Act, with a view to ensuring that works pertaining to permitted developments are carried out in accordance with the planning permission granted and any associated conditions, and that no unauthorised development takes place. If a person is of the view that any development works undertaken, or being undertaken, are not in compliance with the permission granted or are unauthorised, s/he may make a written complaint to the relevant planning authority which is required to investigate the matter and take any appropriate enforcement action, including the issuing of an enforcement notice as necessary.

If an enforcement notice is not complied with, the planning authority may itself take specified steps to ensure compliance with the permission and any conditions attached to it, and recover any reasonable costs incurred in doing so. A planning authority may also seek a court

order under section 160 of the Act, requiring that development is carried out in conformity with the planning permission and any condition attached to that permission, as well as requiring any particular action to be done or not to be done. Complaints about lack of planning enforcement should be addressed to the Director of Planning Services in the local authority concerned.

Legislative responsibility in relation the control of dogs, including the operation of dog breeding establishments, is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Rural and Community Development.

Approved Housing Bodies

223. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if grant assistance is available for a facility (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3710/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Capital funding is provided by my Department to Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs), via the local authorities, for the construction costs of eligible sheltered housing projects under the Capital Assistance Scheme. The AHB receives rental income and, thereafter, the costs of operating the housing, including provision of necessary services, is a matter for the AHB. My Department does not fund the type of services referred to by the Deputy.

Social and Affordable Housing

224. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to reintroduce an affordable housing scheme; when he expects to announce the details of this scheme; the details of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3726/18]

234. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he is taking to provide affordable housing for persons with joint income earning between €75,000 and €100,000 per annum; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3778/18]

242. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the income criteria and expected number of houses per annum of the recently announced affordable homes scheme. [3864/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 224, 234 and 242 together.

The Government acknowledges the affordability pressures faced by households with low to moderate incomes in particular parts of the country. It is precisely for that reason that the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness has prioritised the supply of new homes to meet current and pent-up demand, as well as helping to moderate house prices and rents, on both public and private lands.

Recognising that initiatives introduced to date are having an impact and will have a greater impact in time, on 22 January, I announced a package of initiatives, to help alleviate affordability pressures faced by households, particularly in areas of high housing demand and high accommodation costs. Further details on the suite of initiatives announced earlier this week can be found at <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/min-murphys-statement-on-affordable-homes/>.

With regard to the new Affordable Purchase Scheme, the purpose of which is to enable eligible households to acquire a home of their own, supported by and in partnership with the State, these homes will be built initially on local authority land.

The scheme will be governed on the basis of the relevant provisions of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, which will be commenced shortly. Once the relevant provisions are commenced, I will develop, in consultation with the Housing Agency and local authorities, detailed Regulations covering the operation of the Scheme, including eligibility criteria. Based on the agreed criteria, the elected members of each local authority are then responsible for determining the order of priority to be accorded to eligible households, in relation to the sale of affordable dwellings.

Once the regulatory framework is in place, local authorities will have more options for the development of their land bank for affordable housing. Currently, Dublin City Council has three major ready-to-go sites being advanced through procurement. The elected members of the City Council have determined that 20% of the homes on these sites - at Infirmaroy Road, Emmett Road, and Oscar Traynor Road - will be affordable.

I anticipate that there is significant potential for the delivery of affordable homes on local authority lands. Following on from the Housing Summit on 22 January, I have asked local authority Chief Executives to submit, by mid-February, an outline of their respective affordable housing programmes, with a particular emphasis on Dublin, Galway, and Cork, where there is the greatest affordability gap.

Finally, with regard to households who do not meet income eligibility criteria for the new Affordable Purchase Scheme, the Help-to-Buy initiative which was retained in Budget 2018 should help alleviate some of the specific challenges faced by those first-time buyers in accessing the housing market. The initiative has been designed to provide immediate and targeted support for first-time buyers in meeting their deposit requirements and encouraging the construction of new housing units.

Housing Adaptation Grant Applications

225. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of an appeal for a housing adaptation grant by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3728/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I refer to the reply to Question No. 663 of 23 January 2018.

Local Authority Housing Provision

226. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when negotiations will be concluded regarding the provision of housing at a site (details supplied) previously used to temporarily accommodate a school; when construction will commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3734/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I understand that negotiations between Meath County Council and the Department of Education and Skills regarding the transfer of the site to facilitate housing development in the Ashbourne

area, are at an advanced stage.

My Department recently wrote to the Department of Education and Skills, to highlight the potential value of this site to support housing delivery under Rebuilding Ireland.

I look forward to this being advanced, as soon as possible.

Local Authority Housing Data

227. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount spent, and the number of additional housing units delivered, from July 2016 to the end of 2017, in each category. [3749/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department makes funding available to all local authorities to deliver additional social housing stock through new construction projects, the acquisition of new and previously owned houses/apartments and through working with approved housing bodies under a range of delivery options.

A breakdown of the units delivered in 2016 and up to the end of quarter 3 of 2017 is published and available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.

I also publish separate details on the outputs under Part V arrangements and these are also available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/affordable-housing/affordable-housing-and-part-v-statistics>. Information on Part V arrangements in respect of 2017 is currently being finalised and will then be published.

In relation to full year outputs for 2017, provisional details on the number of units delivered were published on 15 January 2018 and are available on my Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/rebuilding-ireland/social-housing-delivery-2017-ministers-statement>.

A breakdown of these numbers across all local authorities areas for 2017 will be published on my Department's website, following completion of the necessary validation process.

The expenditure details for the 15 month period from 1 July 2016 to 30 September 2017 under the categories requested is set out in the table below:

Housing Category	Expenditure - 1 July 2016 to 30 September 2017€m
Local Authority Build & Acquisitions Programme	447
Approved Housing Body Build & Acquisitions Programme	127
Part V Delivery	9

Tenant Purchase Scheme

228. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when a new tenant purchase scheme will be implemented; when the new scheme will purchase affordable sites; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3767/18]

246. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the new tenant purchase scheme will be launched; the mortgage approval process for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3868/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 228 and 246 together.

The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum and having been in receipt of social housing support for at least one year.

The financing of any house sold under the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme is a separate matter from the eligibility criteria for the scheme. If the tenant is deemed eligible under the scheme, he or she may fund the purchase of a house from one, or a combination, of his / her own resources or a mortgage provided by a financial institution or a local authority house purchase loan.

In line with the commitment given in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, a review of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase Scheme's operation has been undertaken. The review has incorporated analysis of comprehensive data received from local authorities regarding the operation of the scheme during 2016 and a wide-ranging public consultation process which took place in 2017 and saw submissions received from individuals, elected representatives and organisations.

The review is now complete and a full report setting out findings and recommendations has been prepared. I expect to be in a position to publish the outcome of the review shortly.

European Investment Bank

229. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to increase European Investment Bank investment in special development zones such as Adamstown Hansfield and Cherrywood to provide additional affordable rental properties; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3773/18]

237. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the engagement he has had with the European Investment Bank regarding investment in a national affordable rental scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3781/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 229 and 237 together.

The Government is committed to working with the European Investment Bank (EIB) to secure long-term, low-interest funds for major infrastructure works, including housing development. Potential mechanisms for investment in social and affordable housing were the focus of a high-level event, jointly organised by my Department and the EIB, which took place on 22 March 2017. Since then, officials from my Department and I have met with the EIB on a number of occasions to discuss the potential for EIB funding as an additional investment source for the delivery of social and affordable housing.

I welcome the fact that the EIB is actively engaging with local authorities. Fingal County Council recently signed a €70 million Framework Loan Agreement with the EIB which will

trigger a €180 million investment in strategic infrastructure projects within the county's Capital Development Plan. The funding will be invested in capital projects, including housing land activation. The agreement represents the first EIB support for county-wide investment, in partnership with an Irish local authority, for more than a decade.

This Framework signals the start of new funding streams for local authorities, which is a very positive development. Other local authorities can learn from these negotiations and are being encouraged to consider EIB funding sources for housing, including affordable rental and land activation projects, at appropriate sites and Strategic Development Zones.

National Planning Framework

230. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans for additional special development zones at brownfield sites in the greater Dublin area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3774/18]

231. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to co-ordinate the redevelopment of brownfield sites with the three Dublin local authorities that have boundaries with Dublin city to ensure cohesive community centred development; his views on whether there is potential for residential development at these locations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3775/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 230 and 231 together.

The National Planning Framework (NPF), which is currently in the process of being finalised, will set out an ambitious vision for what our country should and can look like in 2040. The Framework advances national policy around both brownfield policy and infill areas by providing targets as part of a wider strategy for managing and planning for growth in urban areas.

The finalisation of the NPF and the 10-year Capital Investment Plan will be followed through by tasking our three Regional Assemblies to bring forward complementary Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs), linking strategic national planning and investment with regional scale physical planning and the local economic and community development functions of local authorities.

Formulation of the RSEs has commenced, a key component of which is the preparation of initial metropolitan area strategic plans. In this regard, the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, working with the relevant local authorities across the Greater Dublin Area, will co-ordinate a strategic metropolitan plan for the Dublin area. Engagement with each of the four Dublin local authorities will be undertaken as part of preparing the Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP), through the RSE process.

The MASPs will inform each local authority development plan, focusing on high-level issues that affect each city as a whole across local authority boundaries, as well as setting investment priorities, ranging from planning for transport, housing and economic development to major regeneration areas and projects.

This process will provide for the identification of key development sites across the Dublin metropolitan area, particularly infill including brownfield in line with NPF policy objectives. Where appropriate proposals are brought forward for designating new strategic development zones, particularly in our key urban areas, I will positively consider them for Government designation.

In addition, taking account of the potential to breathe new life into existing but underutilised parts of our cities and towns, there is an intention to support the brownfield objectives of the NPF through a potential ‘Smart Growth Initiative’ under the forthcoming Capital Investment Plan. The purpose of this will be to bring different sectoral investment streams together to achieve compact, sustainable growth in Ireland’s five cities and other urban centres. In particular, the aim will be to regenerate underutilised or derelict areas, improve the liveability of urban areas, encourage economic development and ensure a shift towards more sustainable patterns of transport and energy consumption.

Mayoral Election

232. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the reform of local government in the greater Dublin area in particular the provision of a directly elected mayor for Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3776/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): The Programme for Partnership Government includes a commitment to consider directly elected mayors in cities as part of a broader range of local government reform measures aimed at strengthening local democracy. In response to this commitment, a policy discussion report on metropolitan governance for Ireland’s cities is at an advanced stage of preparation. It will be submitted to Government in the near future and presented to the Oireachtas thereafter for consideration.

The main issues to be examined in this policy discussion report include the geographic definition of metropolitan areas, the range of functions which could be assigned to a metropolitan governance structure, and options for such a structure’s governance and political leadership, including by direct election.

Departmental Functions

233. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department has responsibility for the updating of the boundaries of district electoral divisions; his views on whether this is necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3777/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): I have no proposals at present to make adjustments to the boundaries of electoral divisions, which were formerly known as district electoral divisions. However, I established two Local Electoral Area Boundary Committees on 13 December 2017 to review and make recommendations on local electoral areas. They are tasked with reporting to me within six months. The review is being undertaken having regard to the results of Census 2016 and the commitment to consider reducing the size of territorially large local electoral areas in *A Programme for Partnership Government*, published in May 2016.

The Committees are independent in the performance of their functions. However, I understand that the Committees have invited submissions and the closing date for making a submission is 19 February 2018. Further information is available at www.boundarycommittee.ie and any queries can be directed to boundarycommittee@housing.gov.ie.

Question No. 234 answered with Question No. 224.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

235. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to increase affordable housing provision in developments other than those on State or public land; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3779/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Government acknowledges the affordability pressures faced by households with low to moderate incomes in particular parts of the country. It is precisely for that reason that the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness has prioritised the supply of new homes to meet current and pent-up demand, as well as helping to moderate house prices and rents, on both public and private lands.

The Government has already implemented a number of measures to facilitate the delivery of homes at more affordable price points, to buy or rent, on private lands. These include:

- a new fast-track planning process for large developments and apartments to speed up decisions and provide greater certainty;

- funding of some €226 million to open up housing lands through the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF), to deliver new homes that are more viable and more affordable than would otherwise be the case;

- planning reforms and guidelines to provide flexibility and certainty in delivering viable housing schemes and apartment developments in the right locations; and

- the establishment of Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFI,) a new State funded bank to provide competitive loans for builders, keeping their costs low.

A range of other measures are also being implemented under Rebuilding Ireland to ensure that private land is brought forward for development, without delay, including the removal of the Capital Gains Tax incentive to hold on to residential land, escalating penalties for land hoarding under the Vacant Site Levy and a second phase of LIHAF.

Recognising that measures introduced to date are having an impact and will have a greater impact in time, on 22 January, I announced a further package of initiatives to help alleviate affordability pressures faced by households, particularly in areas of high housing demand and high accommodation costs. Following the Housing Summit with local authority Chief Executives on 22 January, I have asked each Chief Executive to furnish a report to me by mid-February setting out their plans for the delivery of social and affordable homes from their respective land banks.

Further details on the suite of affordability initiatives announced on 22 January can be found at <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/min-murphys-statement-on-affordable-homes/>.

Rental Sector Strategy

236. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to provide affordable rental properties in Dublin, Cork and Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3780/18]

244. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of the pilot project on affordable rental schemes. [3866/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I

propose to take Questions Nos. 236 and 244 together.

The Government recognises the housing affordability pressures in certain areas and is determined to see increases in the supply of high quality social and affordable homes, to buy or rent, as quickly as possible, particularly in the major urban areas such as Dublin, Cork and Galway.

The Government has already introduced a number of measures to help to bring rents down to more affordable levels, including the:

- Introduction of Rent Pressure Zones,
- Introduction of new ‘Build to Rent’ and “shared accommodation” guidelines to encourage development and investment in more rental accommodation at more affordable rents, and
- progressing measures to bring as many vacant and underutilised properties as possible back into use.

Recognising that initiatives introduced to date are having an impact and will have a greater impact in time, on 22 January, I announced a package of initiatives to help alleviate affordability pressures faced by households, particularly in areas of high housing demand and high accommodation costs. This includes a new affordable rental scheme, to be based on a cost rental model. Further details on the suite of initiatives announced earlier this week can be found at <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/min-murphys-statement-on-affordable-homes/>.

This cost rental model provides that the rent paid covers the cost of building the property, together with on-going management and maintenance charges, but with a minimal profit margin included. This provides greater certainty around the rent, regardless of what is happening in the market. A pilot cost rental project is currently being progressed by Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, in conjunction with the Housing Agency, and an Approved Housing Body, using land owned by the Agency. I expect this pilot to go to the market later this year to secure a development partner and the best value for the State and prospective renters.

I am eager to see local authorities realise further social and affordable homes from their lands without delay, and in this regard, following the Housing Summit on 22 January, I have asked each Chief Executive to furnish a report to me by mid-February, setting out their plans for delivery. I expect further affordable rental proposals to be put forward by local authorities, especially those in the main urban centres, as part of this process.

Finally, in tandem with initiatives announced, my Department will lead an expert group to examine the issues and provide advice on the most appropriate way forward in delivering a more sustainable rental sector in Ireland. I am currently considering the terms of reference, formation and composition of the Group with a view to establishing it later this quarter.

Question No. 237 answered with Question No. 229.

Planning Issues

238. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3788/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The zoning of lands for particular uses is a reserved function of the elected members of a planning authority, in accordance with the statutory development plan procedures under the

Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). Chapter 4 of the 2007 Development Plans Guidelines issued under section 28 of the Act provides a framework to be used, when considering decisions on zoning as part of the development plan process.

In relation to the specific issue referred to, I have been informed that Kerry County Council's Renewable Energy Strategy was adopted by way of a Variation to the Kerry County Development Plan 2009-2015 on 5th November 2012. The preparation of this Strategy was preceded by a Landscape Character Assessment (LCA), which informed the Strategy, but did not form part of the Strategy or the County Development Plan.

The Current County Development Plan 2015-2021 was adopted on 16 February 2016 and included the 2012 Renewable Energy Strategy.

While Local Authorities have been advised not to review planning policy until a review of the Wind Energy Development Guidelines 2006 has been completed, I am aware that Kerry County Council have begun a review of their LCA which, upon completion, will best position the Council to consider a policy review, once the revised Wind Energy Development Guidelines have been finalised and published.

Local Authority Housing Mortgages

239. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 235 of 17 of January 2018, and in view of the announcement of the introduction of the new scheme Rebuilding Ireland home loan, his plans to amend this loan scheme to include persons that are not first time buyers but due to changed circumstances, for example, marriage, separation or ill-health had to sell their home and are unable to secure home mortgages through commercial lending institutions (details supplied). [3822/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Following a review of the two existing local authority home loan schemes, the House Purchase Loan and the Home Choice Loan, I am introducing a new loan offering, known as the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, with effect from 1 February 2018. The new loan will enable credit worthy first time buyers to access sustainable mortgage lending to purchase new or second-hand properties in a suitable price range. The low rate of fixed interest associated with the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan provides first time buyers with access to mortgage finance that they may not have otherwise been able to afford at a higher interest rate.

As with previous local authority house purchase loan finance, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is available to first time buyers only. There is no change in this regard. This is to ensure the effective targeting of limited resources.

The option currently available for non-first time buyers is to seek home loan facilities from one of the commercial lending institutions.

Local Authority Funding

240. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the funding allocated to each local authority in each of the years 2015 to 2017 with respect to refurbishing voids, purchasing properties, building new units and for HAP, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3854/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):
The information requested is set out in the table.

For 2017, in addition to the funding provided to local authorities under the build and acquisition programme, further funding of €70 million was provided in respect of the Housing Agency Acquisitions programme to facilitate the acquisition of suitable portfolios of properties for social housing from financial institutions and investors.

In respect of the provision of HAP funding, Limerick City and County Council provides a highly effective HAP transactional shared service on behalf of all local authorities. This HAP Shared Services Centre (SSC) manages all HAP related rental transactions for the tenant, local authority and landlord. Accordingly, my Department does not recoup individual local authorities in respect of HAP rental payments in their administrative areas but rather recoups all landlord costs via the HAP SSC.

My Department has since 2015 provided local authorities with a HAP administrative payment of €150 per HAP household on the basis of the cumulative number of new households supported through HAP in each year. This administrative payment recognises the resources required to manage the HAP process by local authorities.

	2015			2016			2017		
Local Authority	LA/AHB Build & Acquisition €m	Voids €m	HAP €m	LA/AHB Build & Acquisition €m	Voids €m	HAP €m	LA/AHB Build & Acquisition €m	Voids €m	HAP €m
Carlow	2.35	0.30	0.03	4.82	0.07	0.05	9.13	0.09	0.02
Cavan	2.23	0.31	0.00	2.84	0.31	0.01	3.85	0.30	0.01
Clare	4.23	1.47	0.04	4.13	1.33	0.12	14.76	0.97	0.05
Cork County	9.92	2.09	0.15	22.03	1.27	0.15	42.44	1.13	0.08
Donegal	2.13	1.00	0.08	2.87	0.99	0.14	12.15	1.87	0.06
DL Rathdown	16.20	0.26	0.00	13.99	0.18	0.00	37.81	0.28	0.01
Fingal	37.07	1.63	0.00	15.64	1.73	0.00	52.25	1.33	0.02
Galway	1.44	0.71	0.01	4.43	0.47	0.06	5.78	0.40	0.03
Kerry	4.53	0.89	0.00	4.78	0.92	0.01	12.16	1.10	0.03
Kildare	13.95	0.36	0.01	23.4	0.49	0.11	39.47	0.21	0.06
Kilkenny	6.62	0.38	0.09	8.47	0.35	0.05	14.65	0.31	0.02
Laois	4.66	0.06	0.00	3.87	0.10	0.00	9.42	0.03	0.01
Leitrim	0.36	0.18	0.00	1.46	0.71	0.01	1.58	0.00	0.01
Limerick	0.80	0.50	14.81	4.64	0.38	55.99	12.19	0.22	141.09
Longford	0.64	0.43	0.00	1.59	0.51	0.00	4.45	0.00	0.01
Louth	5.18	0.29	0.10	9.57	0.09	0.10	7.34	0.08	0.07
Mayo	1.84	0.29	0.01	5.27	0.23	0.06	6.40	0.26	0.04
Meath	5.25	0.86	0.01	17.44	1.44	0.07	20.00	0.77	0.06
Monaghan	2.62	0.10	0.03	5.87	0.67	0.03	13.48	0.51	0.01
Offaly	2.27	0.55	0.03	2.85	0.85	0.04	4.28	0.11	0.03
Roscommon	0.74	0.26	0.00	1.65	0.81	0.01	5.13	0.04	0.01
Sligo	2.79	0.44	0.01	3.56	1.10	0.03	6.18	0.91	0.03

	2015			2016			2017		
Local Authority	LA/AHB Build & Acquisition €m	Voids €m	HAP €m	LA/AHB Build & Acquisition €m	Voids €m	HAP €m	LA/AHB Build & Acquisition €m	Voids €m	HAP €m
South Dublin	9.26	0.22	0.09	18.69	0.70	0.14	29.96	0.72	0.06
Waterford	6.84	0.49	0.11	9.60	1.13	0.07	6.77	0.57	0.06
Westmeath	1.11	0.65	0.00	4.31	0.44	0.01	5.54	0.33	0.02
Wexford	5.44	0.30	0.00	9.03	0.16	0.01	18.89	0.43	0.04
Wicklow	12.28	0.86	0.00	4.90	0.25	0.01	4.56	0.28	0.03
Tipperary	6.13	1.30	0.03	7.44	1.20	0.13	12.60	1.32	0.08
Cork City	22.06	4.50	0.03	20.97	6.81	0.14	18.06	1.49	0.08
Dublin City	43.26	11.64	0.01	75.71	8.76	0.12	114.93	8.52	10.46
Galway City	4.15	0.22	0.00	0.61	0.35	0.05	7.47	0.12	0.06

Local Authority Housing Mortgages

241. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the criteria for and the estimated number of applications per annum of the recently announced mortgage scheme. [3863/18]

243. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if no- first time buyers were considered in the recently announced mortgage scheme. [3865/18]

247. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of local authority mortgages issued in each of the years 2011 to 2017 nationally and in each local authority; the amount involved; the arrears rate nationally and in each local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3869/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 241, 243 and 247 together.

Following a review of the two existing local authority home loan schemes, the House Purchase Loan and the Home Choice Loan, I am introducing from 1 February 2018 a new loan offering, known as the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan. The new loan will enable credit worthy first time buyers to access sustainable mortgage lending to purchase new or second-hand properties in a suitable price range. The low rate of fixed interest associated with the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan provides first time buyers with access to mortgage finance that they may not otherwise have been able to afford at a higher interest rate. Full details of the loan's eligibility criteria and other information is available from the dedicated Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan website, <http://rebuildingirelandhomeloan.ie/>.

The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is targeted at first time buyers who wish to own their own home, have access to an adequate deposit and have the capacity to repay a mortgage, but who are unable to access a mortgage sufficient for them to purchase their first home. As with the previous local authority loan offerings, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is available to first time buyers only. This is to ensure the effective targeting of limited resources. The option

currently available for non-first time buyers is to seek home loan facilities from one of the commercial lending institutions.

The Housing Finance Agency (HFA) has raised €200 million on a fixed rate basis for periods out to thirty years maturity. Based on the pricing achieved, local authorities can offer a first tranche of fixed rate annuity finance to eligible borrowers at rates of 2.0% and 2.25% per annum, for twenty five and thirty years respectively, up to an aggregate maximum of €200 million. The funding will be drawn down by local authorities from the HFA to match fund their lending under the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan. It is not possible to estimate the number of fixed rate loan applications per annum under this loan.

Information on (1) the overall number and value of local authority loans, and a breakdown by local authority area, issued from 2011 to Q3 2017 and (2) the overall level of local authority loan arrears, and a breakdown by local authority area, from 2011 to end Q3 2017 is available on my Department's website at <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity>.

Question No. 242 answered with Question No. 224.

Question No. 243 answered with Question No. 241.

Question No. 244 answered with Question No. 236.

Housing Data

245. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when monthly reports of housing target and delivery will be published. [3867/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): At the second Housing Summit, held on January 22nd, I asked each Local Authority Chief Executive to furnish a report by mid-February, confirming and setting out how their Local Authority will deliver on its social housing targets over the coming years. It is my intention that the targets will be published as soon as possible thereafter, and progress made by each Local Authority in terms of delivery against these targets will then be published on an ongoing basis, providing greater accountability and driving delivery.

Question No. 246 answered with Question No. 228.

Question No. 247 answered with Question No. 241.

Deer Hunting

248. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the position regarding the proposed mandatory hunter competence as assessment programme and concerns raised by farmers and members of the public. [3882/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): My Department grants some 5,000 licences annually to hunt deer during the Open Season which is the period during which deer can be legally shot under licence. The Open Season for deer operates generally from 1 September to 28 February, depending on the species and gender of deer.

In March 2015 my Department along with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the

Marine published the report *Deer Management in Ireland – A Framework for Action* which includes policy recommendations relating to deer conservation and management that could be pursued by both Departments and stakeholders. An Irish Deer Management Forum was established to implement the various actions listed in the Report. The Forum itself comprises representatives from the main stakeholder areas such as landowners, forestry, hunting and conservation organisations as well as representatives from both Departments.

The Forum has issued a number of recommendations including a recommendation that mandatory certification of deer hunters should be introduced on a phased basis over a five year period from 1st January 2018 for existing licensed deer hunters and that new deer hunters should have the required certification from 1 January 2018.

I acknowledge the importance of ensuring that deer hunting is carried out in a safe manner. In that context my Department is considering how best to implement the recommendations of the group having regard to a range of factors including the fact that there are many hunters with many years of experience, knowledge and expertise and also the need to ensure and the most appropriate training and certification process would ultimately be implemented having regard to the most up-to-date safety, conservation and hunting considerations taking account of both local and international best practice.

In that regard my Department is satisfied that the most appropriate course of action is to consider the introduction of an appropriate training and certification process for first time applicants for deer hunting licences to commence from a date which will be determined in due course but certainly no later than 2020.

Irish Coursing Club

249. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if a licence has been issued to a club (details supplied) to host a second day of trials at Powerstown Park, Clonmel; and if so, the criteria and circumstances under which a licence was issued. [3799/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): In October 2017 my Department issued a revised licence in relation to coursing under Section 34 of the Wildlife Act 1976 (as amended) to the Irish Coursing Club (ICC) on behalf of its affiliated clubs which included new and revised conditions relating to the reporting of coursing trials. One such condition stipulates that an individual coursing club may hold no more than one trial session but that in exceptional circumstances the ICC may apply to hold a second day's trial.

My Department recently received a request from the ICC to hold a second day's trial in relation the three day National Coursing Meeting which is scheduled to be held in Clonmel on 10th, 11th and 12th February. This application is currently under consideration and a decision will be conveyed to the ICC in due course.

Airport Development Projects

250. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when the land for Clifden airport was purchased; the person or body from which the land was purchased; the amount paid for the land; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3802/18]

251. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when the land for Inishbofin airport was purchased; the person or body from which the land was purchased; the amount paid for the land; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3803/18]

252. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the amount her Department has spent developing Clifden airport to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3804/18]

253. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the amount her Department has spent developing Inishbofin airport to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3805/18]

254. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans for Clifden airport; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3806/18]

255. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans for Inishbofin airport; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3807/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): I propose to take Questions Nos. 250 to 255, inclusive, together.

The table sets out the data that the Deputy has requested:

SITE	PURCHASED FROM	SITE PURCHASE COST	YEAR(S)	DEVELOPMENT COST
Clifden	Clifden and West Connemara Airport PLC	€474,113	2007	€4,911,765
Inishbofin	Various registered owners under CPO	€460,474	2004 - 2016	€3,270,182

Regarding plans for the sites, in 2017, my Department undertook a public consultation process whereby it sought submissions from interested parties in relation to the future use of both Clifden and Inishbofin airstrips. A large number of submissions were received and these are currently being reviewed by my Department. The submissions received will inform my Department in its deliberations regarding the future of these facilities.

Creative Ireland Programme

256. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the local authorities that have not yet published their culture and creative plans; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [3846/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Pillar 2 of the Creative Ireland Programme - Enabling Creativity in every Community is a key element of the Programme and the 31 Local Authorities are important partners.

Last year, a sum of €2m (€1m from my Department and €1m from the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government) was allocated between all 31 Local Authorities to enable them to develop and implement their Culture and Creativity Action Plans for 2017 which included an associated programme of events and initiatives in each county. All local authorities produced a Culture and Creativity Plan in 2017 which are available online at <https://creativeireland.ie/en/local-plans>.

The local authorities are currently preparing long-term Culture and Creativity Strategies

which will aim to ensure that people and communities across Ireland will have the opportunity to fully realise their creative potential at local level. These Strategies will be accompanied by an Activity Programme for 2018 and for every subsequent year of the Strategy. It is expected that both the Strategies and Activity Plans will be published during the Spring of 2018.