

## **Written Answers.**

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

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*Questions Nos. 1 to 9, inclusive, answered orally.*

### **Apprenticeship Programmes**

10. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to address the failure to increase the number of apprenticeships required in construction and related trades; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4895/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** Apprenticeship is a demand driven educational and training programme, which aims to develop the skills of an apprentice in order to meet the needs of industry and the labour market. Consequently, the number of construction related apprentices being registered is determined by employers within the construction sector. My Department is committed to supporting the registration of apprentices across all sectors, including the construction sector, and I understand from SOLAS that the forecast for future apprenticeship registrations in the sector remains strong.

Construction related apprentice registrations increased from 1,713 in 2015 to 2,314 in 2016 which represents an increase of 35%. This trend continued in 2017 with a further increase of 28% on the 2016 figure bringing the total number of construction related registrations to 2,963.

As the Deputy is aware, we are currently expanding the range of apprenticeships on offer to meet the identified skill needs of industry. Arising from our first call for apprenticeship proposals in 2015 an apprenticeship in Engineering Services Management, with the Construction Industry Federation (CIF) as industry lead, is currently being developed into a national apprenticeship programme. In addition, we recently announced 26 new programmes, arising from last year's second call for proposal, to be further developed into national apprenticeships, including a scaffolding apprenticeship, again with the CIF as industry lead and a senior quantity surveyor apprenticeship with the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland as industry lead. These new programmes, once developed, will add to and complement the range of apprenticeships currently on offer in developing the skill needs identified by the sector.

*Questions Nos. 11 to 15, inclusive, answered orally.*

### **Schools Building Projects Administration**

16. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review the practice of tendering school build projects in view of the collapse of a company (details supplied) resulting in the discontinuation of work on six school build sites here; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [4658/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The liquidation of the company referred to by the Deputy does not directly affect any school building projects other than the Schools Bundle 5 Public Private Partnership (PPP) programme.

In the case of PPPs, the Department's contract is with a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) rather than with a construction contractor. The SPV then enters into a separate contract with a construction company to procure the construction element of the contract. In this way, it differs from traditional school building projects.

In particular, where a liquidation event arises with the construction contractor in a PPP project, it is the responsibility of the PPP operator to ensure that construction is completed. The PPP operator is incentivised to resolve the issue as quickly as possible, as the State does not commence payments under the contract until construction is complete.

With regard to the procurement and award process for all school building contracts, my Department adheres to the rules and guidelines set down by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the EU Commission in relation to public procurement.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has responsibility for implementing national policy on public procurement, particularly in relation to construction procurement.

The Capital Works Management Framework developed by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform allows for various bond and guarantee options designed to protect the Contracting Authority/Employer from issues such as contractor insolvencies. These options include retention deductions, performance bonds and parent company guarantees. The majority of major projects in the education sector operate using a combination of a performance bond and retention deductions.

### **Apprenticeship Programmes**

17. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to boost the number of apprenticeships and traineeships in County Sligo and nationally in 2018 with reference to the action plan to expand apprenticeships and traineeships. [4817/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** The Government are currently expanding the number of apprenticeships on offer into a range of new sectors of the economy. Following two calls for apprenticeship proposals made by the Apprenticeship Council, there are new apprenticeships in development in occupations ranging from healthcare to hospitality to meet the skill needs of industry. To date nine new apprenticeships have commenced in areas such as insurance, accounting and financial services. An additional ten new programmes are scheduled to get underway later this year. All of these new apprenticeships are national programmes that can be delivered on a nationwide basis.

In addition, we have seen strong growth in registrations across the craft trades nationally during 2017 with 4,508 at year end, which represents a 20% increase on 2016.

The Government is also prioritising the expansion of traineeship offerings. At the end of 2017, an additional eight new traineeships had been developed in areas such as hospitality, engineering and animation. These new programmes will complement the existing programmes on offer. The programmes have been designed by ETBs working in collaboration with employers to meet identified skill needs. In addition, we have broadened the eligibility criteria on partici-

pation to include school leavers, older learners and people in employment.

Education and training providers are also engaging positively with the Regional Skills Fora in order to address skills deficits in their regions. This engagement informs the planning for education and training programmes, including apprenticeship and traineeship.

I am pleased to say that both IT Sligo and Mayo Sligo Leitrim ETB have been very actively involved in this initiative. IT Sligo is the coordinating provider for the very first of the new breed of apprenticeships for insurance practitioner, while the ETB is the coordinating provider for a butcher and associate sales professional. They also have expanded their range of craft apprenticeships including electrical, electrical instrumentation, vehicle body repair, toolmaking, carpentry and joinery.

### **Schools Building Projects Data**

18. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of schools being built through the private finance initiative and European Investment Bank packages; the names, location and value by bundle if applicable; the principal contractors in respect of same; the estimated date for completion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4892/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Over 19,500 permanent school places have already been delivered through PPP schools bundles that are currently operational.

The Schools Bundle 5 PPP programme was part of the Government's 2012 stimulus package and is the only education related PPP programme currently under construction. This programme will provide 6 schools on 4 sites in Wicklow, Wexford, Meath and Carlow. The schools are Loreto College, Wexford; Coláiste Raithín and St. Philomena's Primary School, Bray; Eureka Secondary School Kells; Tyndall College and Carlow Institute of Further Education, Carlow.

The European Investment Bank is the long-term lending institution of the European Union owned by its Member States. In 2016, the European Investment Bank provided a 25-year loan to the National Treasury Management Agency acting on behalf of the Irish State to support the construction, enlargement and modernisation of 71 schools over a four year period. The €200 million loan represents the largest ever support for school investment in Ireland approved by the European Investment Bank. The Bank had previously provided loans for investment in school projects in 2012 and 2013.

The funding from the European Investment Bank is one of the sources utilised by the National Treasury Management Agency to underpin the capital allocations identified in the annual estimates provision. Each of these 71 school projects in question will be delivered individually and are not subject to a bundle delivery process. However, it should also be noted that the EIB has previously invested in the Schools Bundle 2 and Schools Bundle 3 PPP programmes.

The EIB will also support the delivery by way of PPP of the Central and East Quads in Grangegorman for Dublin Institute of Technology.

The detailed information requested by the Deputy in relation to the PPP school bundles and the 71 traditional school projects funded by EIB investment is being provided with the hard copy of this answer in tabular form in the following link:

[<a href="/debates%20authoring/webattachments.nsf/0/B87819D120CD20BC80258227005C9F3D/\$File/Table%20of%20Information%20for%20PQ%204892-18.

## Teacher Recruitment

19. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures he will take to overcome teacher shortages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4901/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Additional investment has allowed the successful recruitment of over 5,000 additional teachers in the last two years. Since 2012/2013, there are 8,900 more teachers in our schools. No other part of the public service has seen this sort of growth, which is testament to the Government's commitment to, and the importance of education in, fulfilling our national ambitions.

The numbers of graduates from initial teacher education (ITE) programmes have also remained broadly constant. Over 8,000 primary and 7,800 second level teachers have graduated in the last five years and in 2018 it is estimated that approximately 1,870 primary and 1,523 post primary teachers will graduate.

However, I fully acknowledge the concerns that have been expressed about teacher supply.

Last Friday I announced the suspension of restrictions on substitution limits for career breaks. Schools have also been reminded that, in considering career break applications, the needs of pupils should take precedence and they must take account of the availability of appropriate qualified replacement teachers.

At post primary level, we are examining the operation of the PME and considering the introduction of subject quotas, targeted at areas of shortage. We are also considering the introduction of "top up" or conversion courses to upskill teachers.

I have announced my intention to double the number of places on undergraduate courses for second level teachers.

I intend shortly to establish a Teacher Supply Steering Group to develop a strategy for teacher supply. As part of its remit, the Group will consult with key stakeholders.

In 2018 I will also ask the Teaching Council to review subject criteria and processes for assessing overseas qualifications and to engage more with graduate fairs and final year students.

## Departmental Contracts

20. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the contracts between his Department and a company (details supplied); if the contracts are insured; the consequences for the delivery of the contracted service or construction projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4893/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** A contract exists between my Department and the PPP Company Inspiredspaces in respect of the Schools Bundle 5 PPP programme. Inspiredspaces is the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) responsible for the design, construction, finance, operation and maintenance of the buildings included in the programme.

Inspiredspaces is a joint venture between Carillion and the Dutch Infrastructure fund (DIF). Following the liquidation of Carillion, DIF is now required to intervene to ensure that

the schools in the PPP programme are completed to the satisfaction of the State.

The State's protection in this context lies in the robust provisions of the PPP contract, namely the contractual obligations and financial imperatives for the PPP Company, and its funders, to rectify the impact of the liquidation, and to deliver the buildings and the services within the shortest possible timeframe.

It is fully understandable that everybody connected with the schools is seeking certainty on the timing of completion. However, DIF has also asked for understanding that the process of putting in place the necessary rectification measures will require some time, particularly given the scale, complexity and long-term nature of the contract. The outcome of this process will provide greater clarity in relation to likely school completion dates.

The NDFA is managing the contract on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills and remains in very close contact with DIF. DIF has confirmed that resolution of the situation is its top priority. Both the Department and NDFA are satisfied that everything possible is being done to ensure delivery of the schools in as timely a manner as possible.

In accordance with the contract, Inspired Spaces has taken out insurances for the construction works: these policies remain valid and in place. Inspired Spaces will be obliged to take out insurances for the 25 year services period prior to opening of the schools.

### **Teacher Recruitment**

21. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the measures he will take to attract new persons to a career in teaching second level, in particular maths and science; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4653/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Over 5,000 additional teachers have been successfully recruited in the last two years and the numbers of graduates from initial teacher education programmes have remained broadly constant. In 2018 it is estimated that approximately 1,870 primary and 1,523 post primary teachers will graduate.

In November 2017 I launched a STEM Policy Statement and Implementation Plan, which aims to make Ireland the best in Europe in STEM by 2026. This Policy Statement focusses on the many strengths in STEM education in Ireland while providing a roadmap to address the areas for development.

In order to deliver on the ambition we have set to make Ireland the best at STEM education, we will need to increase teacher supply in key priority areas. At post primary level, we are considering the introduction of subject quotas in ITE programmes. We are also considering the introduction of "top up" or conversion courses to upskill teachers. I have also announced that I want to double the number of places on undergraduate course to train second level teachers, particularly in areas like STEM. Many of these courses are already offered in STEM subjects.

I intend shortly to establish a Teacher Supply Steering Group to develop a strategy for teacher supply. As part of its remit, the Group will consult with key stakeholders.

I will also ask the Teaching Council to review subject criteria and processes for assessing out of state qualifications and to engage more with graduate fairs, and final year students.

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

22. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of special needs places for persons at secondary level in the Newbridge, County Kildare, area when they graduate from ASD units at primary level in the area in 2018 and for future years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4891/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department provides for a range of placement options and supports for schools, with students with special educational needs, to ensure that wherever a child is enrolled, s/he will have access to an appropriate education.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) plans and co-ordinates the provision of educational support services to children with special educational needs, in consultation with the relevant education partners and the Health Service Executive (HSE).

The NCSE has assured parents of the students who are due to leave primary school in Newbridge that they are continuing to progress the planning process to ensure that each child has a post primary placement appropriate to their needs for the 2018/19 school year.

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

In this regard, Special Needs Units (SNUs) are currently under construction at 2 post primary schools in Kildare South including St Conleth's Vocational School, Newbridge and Ard Scoil na Trionoide, Athy. The SNU in St Conleth's is expected to be completed and ready for occupation by September 2018 at the latest.

Major building projects for a number of Post Primary schools in Kildare are included on the Department's 6 Year Construction Plan, and Special Needs units (SNUs) are planned to be included in these Developments.

### Legal Proceedings

23. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of the court case scheduled to begin on 15 March 2018 between a school (details supplied) and a trust with regard to whether the sale of the playing pitches at this school will be underwritten; if the school will be supported in its efforts to keep the pitches for use by students into the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4818/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I am not a party to the litigation concerning the school in respect of which the Deputy provided details to me. Consequently it would be inappropriate for me to speculate on the outcome of a matter before the courts.

Separately I would like to advise the Deputy that I have received a request from the Patron of the school concerned to approve the dissolution of the Board of Management of the school. I have a statutory duty to consider this request in accordance with the provisions of the Education Act 1998.

Until I have fully considered the request and the dissolution process is concluded I am not in a position to comment on matters that are related to the request. To make a public comment on this request to dissolve the board would be for me to pre-judge a statutory function which I must now discharge.

*Questions - Written Answers*  
**Schools Site Acquisitions**

24. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a site is expected to be purchased to accommodate the three school campus in Buncrana, County Donegal; the timeframe of works to ensure that this school campus is completed as soon as possible; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4650/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy is aware the project in respect of the education campus in Buncrana is included on my Department's capital programme.

My Department is working closely with Donegal County Council in relation to the proposed site acquisition and Council officials have confirmed that an update on this process will be provided to my Department at an early date. Once this is received it will be evaluated with a view to definitively progressing the site acquisition. I can assure the Deputy every effort will be made to expedite the site acquisition process.

When the site acquisition is complete the next stage of the process involves the project progressing into architectural planning. At this stage it is premature to give a timeframe for completion of the campus.

### **School Accommodation Provision**

25. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an application for additional school accommodation for a primary school (details supplied) in County Kildare will be approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4824/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I can confirm that my Department has received an application for additional accommodation from the school referred to by the Deputy.

The application will be assessed and a decision will be conveyed to the school authority as soon as the assessment process is completed.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

26. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the work within his Department on the demographic review for south County Kildare to determine if a new secondary school is required; the way in which proposed extensions at second level for the area are progressing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4890/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy may be aware, in order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas. My Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. The GIS uses data from a range of sources, including the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and the Department's own databases. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed.

Where demographic data indicates that additional provision is required, the delivery of such additional provision is dependent on the particular circumstances of each case and may, depending on the circumstances, be provided through either one, or a combination of, the following:

Utilising existing unused capacity within a school or schools;

Extending the capacity of a school or schools;

Provision of a new school or schools.

As with other school planning areas nationwide, the demographic data for the South Kildare school planning areas is being kept under ongoing review by the Department to take account of updated data. It is anticipated that decisions based on the nationwide demographic exercises will be announced shortly.

I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department expects the building project at St Conleth's Community College, Newbridge to be completed and ready for occupation by September 2018. The project when completed, will assist in meeting demographic need in the area. In addition, I wish to advise the Deputy that major building projects at 7 post-primary schools in County Kildare are included on my Department's 6 year Construction Plan.

### **Teachers' Remuneration**

27. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the timeframe to end pay inequality in all teaching grades and to deal with the crisis in the shortage of teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4843/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration for public servants to start. I negotiated together with my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, a 15-22% pay increase for new teachers. The agreements to date have restored an estimated 75% of the difference in pay for more recently recruited teachers and deliver full equality at later points in the scale.

As a result of the changes I negotiated together with my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, the current starting salary of a new teacher is €35,958 and from 1 October 2020 onwards will be €37,692. If full equalisation was achieved the starting salary for a post-primary teacher from 1 October 2020 would be €43,879 and for a primary teacher would be €41,511.

Differential pay scales were introduced by the then Government in 2010. It must be borne in mind that the pay reduction for post-2011 entrants to the public service applied to all public servants and not just teachers, and that any restoration of these measures in respect of teachers would be expected to be applied elsewhere across the public service. While I am not in a position to provide an estimate of the total cost of restoring all post-1 January 2011 entrants in all of the public service to the pre-2011 pay scale arrangements, I can say that in the case of education and training sector employees, including teachers, the estimated current full year cost would be in the order of €130 million. Clearly, the cost across the entire public service would be substantially higher.

To have gone further than the pay increases that have been negotiated for 2018 would mean I would have had less money available to hire over 1,000 extra SNAs in 2018, and over 1,000 extra teachers in 2018.

Any further negotiation on new entrant pay is a cross sectorial issue, not just an issue for the education sector. The Government also supports the gradual, negotiated repeal of the FEMPI legislation, having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

A commitment is included in the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 to consider the issue of newly qualified pay within 12 months of the commencement of the Agreement. That process has now commenced with a first meeting on 12 October 2017. The three teacher unions attended that first meeting.

In addition, the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 provides that within 3 months of the passing of the Act, my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform will prepare and lay before the Oireachtas a report on the cost of and a plan in dealing with pay equalisation for new entrants to the public service.

### **Schools Building Contractors**

28. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the consequences of the collapse of a company (details supplied) on six school build projects here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4657/18]

35. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the six schools and colleges affected by the collapse of a company (details supplied); if he has made contact with another company; his views on whether there will be a delay in completing the works; if a contingency plan has been developed for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4858/18]

56. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on the delivery of schools following the collapse of a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4897/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 28, 35 and 56 together.

In respect of the Schools Bundle 5 PPP programme, a contract exists between my Department and the Principal contractor, Inspiredspaces. Inspiredspaces is the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) responsible for the design, construction, finance, operation and maintenance of the schools.

The company referred to by the Deputies has been a 50% shareholder in the SPV. The other shareholder in the SPV is the Dutch Infrastructure Fund (DIF).

Inspiredspaces remains in place as the SPV responsible for delivery of Schools Bundle 5. The PPP contract between my Department and the SPV equally remains in place. The National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) manages that contract on behalf of my Department.

The Dutch Infrastructure Fund is now required to intervene to ensure that the schools in the PPP programme are completed to the satisfaction of the State. It is currently in the process of developing a rectification plan and remains in close contact with the NDFA in that regard. The outcome of this process will provide greater clarity in relation to likely school completion dates.

The Dutch Infrastructure Fund has confirmed that resolution of the situation is its top priority.

## Schools Building Contractors

29. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether the implication of the collapse of a company (details supplied) is that all PPPs should be taken back into public ownership; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4646/18]

46. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for the services in the six schools and colleges under the remit of a company (details supplied); if his Department will take over the running of the non-academic services in these schools and colleges; if a new tender process for private contractors will be established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4859/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 29 and 46 together.

In respect of the Schools Bundle 5 PPP programme, a contract exists between my Department and the Principal contractor, referred to by Deputy Wallace. This company is the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) responsible for the design, construction, finance, operation and maintenance of the Schools Bundle 5 PPP programme. The SPV is a joint venture between the company referred to by Deputy Boyd Barrett and the Dutch Infrastructure Fund (DIF).

DIF is now required to intervene to ensure that the schools in the PPP programme are completed to the satisfaction of the State. DIF is currently in the process of developing a rectification plan, which will include arrangements both for completion of the construction and for the facilities management. It remains in close contact with the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA), which manages the contract on behalf of my Department. DIF has confirmed that resolution of the situation is its top priority.

It is unfortunately the case that companies involved in both traditional and PPP projects can go into liquidation. In the case of PPPs, the construction and funding risk is transferred to the private partner. It is a feature of these contracts that there are legal, contractual and financial imperatives for the SPV and its funders to deliver the buildings within the shortest possible timeframe. This is why DIF is now responsible for ensuring completion of the schools.

It should also be noted that the State does not commence payments to the SPV until construction is complete. The PPP company is incentivised to ensure that the buildings are completed as soon as possible in order to secure payment from the State.

## Capitation Grants

30. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the capitation grant will be restored; if his attention has been drawn to the persistent funding challenges facing schools across County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4820/18]

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

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

Capitation funding remains a priority for me to address as part of the Action Plan.

The process is underway for restoring grant funding that is used by schools to fund the salaries of ancillary staff. Circular 0079/2017 outlines the current rate increases in order to enable schools to implement the arbitration salary increase for grant-funded school secretaries and caretakers and to also implement the restoration of salary for cleaners arising from the unwinding of FEMPI legislation.

### **Third Level Funding**

31. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to introduce an income contingent student loan system for third level education; when he plans to carry out funding reforms in this sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4822/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding (Cassells Report) which was published in July 2016, clearly outlines the funding challenges in the higher education sector and offers a number of potential policy approaches for consideration. One of these options is for the introduction of an income contingent loan scheme.

As committed to in the Programme for Government, I have referred the Cassells report to the Oireachtas Joint Committee for Education and Skills, as part of the process for building political consensus around the most appropriate means of ensuring a sustainable future funding model for the future. My Department looks forward to receiving the Committee's recommendations which will assist in facilitating informed decision-making for the future direction of funding for higher education. No decisions will be taken in advance of receiving the views of the Committee.

While Cassells deals with the medium and long term funding needs of higher education we also have to consider the immediate challenges. We have therefore prioritised this area in Budgets 2017 and 2018. As a result of this additional investment, my Department is investing €100m more in higher education in 2018 compared to 2016, before the publication of the Cassells Report.

in addition, I recently published an independent review of the current allocation model for funding higher education which provides a roadmap for transitioning towards a reformed funding model that is more transparent, consistent across higher education institutions, incentivises actions in key strategic areas such as research and STEM provision, and supports improved accountability while also respecting institutional autonomy.

### **Third Level Funding**

32. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of his Department's research and actions into increasing funding for the third level sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4654/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Ensuring a sustainable funding model for the higher education sector is a key priority for me.

The Expert Group's Report (Cassells Report) which was published in July 2016, clearly outlines the funding challenges in the higher education sector and offers a number of options for consideration. As committed to in the Programme for Government, the report has been referred

to the Oireachtas Joint Committee for Education and Skills in order to build political consensus around the most appropriate future funding model. My Department looks forward to receiving the Committee's recommendations which will assist in facilitating informed decision-making for the future direction of funding for higher education.

While Cassells deals with the medium and long term funding needs of higher education, I have also acted to address immediate funding challenges. A first step in this direction was the securing of additional funding for the sector in Budget 2017 of €36.5 million.

Building on that investment, I secured an additional €60m investment in higher education in Budget 2018, through a €12.5m increase in Exchequer investment together with a €47.5m investment coming from an increase of 0.1% in the NTF levy. This additional funding will allow for targeted initiatives in higher education including skills programmes, performance and innovation funding, technological university development and apprenticeship costs in the sector. It will also allow for places to be provided for 2,100 additional students in 2018.

In total, my Department will invest €100m more in Higher Education in 2018 compared to 2016, before the publication of the Cassells Report.

To complement this work, I recently published an independent expert review of the current allocation model for funding higher education which provides a roadmap for transitioning towards a reformed funding model that is more transparent, consistent across higher education institutions, that incentivises actions in key strategic areas such as research and STEM provision, and supports improved accountability while also respecting institutional autonomy.

### **Teachers' Remuneration**

33. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which he will address the situation of unequal pay in the teaching profession for new entrants; when the Public Sector Pay Commission expects to publish its report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4823/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration for public servants to start. I negotiated together with my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform a 15-22% pay increase for new teachers. The agreements to date have restored an estimated 75% of the difference in pay for more recently recruited teachers and deliver full equality at later points in the scale.

As a result of the changes I negotiated together with my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, the current starting salary of a new teacher is €35,958 and from 1 October 2020 onwards will be €37,692. If full equalisation was achieved the starting salary for a post-primary teacher from 1 October 2020 would be €43,879 and for a primary teacher would be €41,511.

Differential pay scales were introduced by the then Government in 2010. It must be borne in mind that the pay reduction for post-2011 entrants to the public service applied to all public servants and not just teachers, and that any restoration of these measures in respect of teachers would be expected to be applied elsewhere across the public service. While I am not in a position to provide an estimate of the total cost of restoring all post-1 January 2011 entrants in all of the public service to the pre-2011 pay scale arrangements, I can say that in the case of education and training sector employees, including teachers, the estimated current full year cost would be in the order of €130 million. Clearly, the cost across the entire public service would

be substantially higher.

To have gone further than the pay increases that have been negotiated for 2018 would mean I would have had less money available to hire over 1,000 extra SNAs in 2018, and over 1,000 extra teachers in 2018.

Any further negotiation on new entrant pay is a cross sectorial issue, not just an issue for the education sector. The Government also supports the gradual, negotiated repeal of the FEMPI legislation, having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

A commitment is included in the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 to consider the issue of newly qualified pay within 12 months of the commencement of the Agreement. That process has now commenced with a first meeting on 12 October 2017. The three teacher unions attended that first meeting.

In addition, the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 provides that within 3 months of the passing of the Act, my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform will prepare and lay before the Oireachtas a report on the cost of and a plan in dealing with pay equalisation for new entrants to the public service.

### **School Transport Eligibility**

34. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to improve the criteria for school transport eligibility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4887/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** School transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department.

Currently over 115,000 children, including almost 12,000 children with special educational needs, are being transported in over 4,500 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

The purpose of my Department's School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

Children are generally eligible for school transport if they satisfy the distance criteria and are attending their nearest school. It is important to note that all eligible children are accommodated under the terms of the scheme.

Arising from commitments in the Programme for Government, a review of the Concessionary Charges and Rules element of the School Transport Scheme was undertaken.

The review was published in December 2016 and made recommendations on both the charges and the rules element of concessionary school transport.

With regard to the charges for concessionary school transport the recommended course of action was to continue with the current position whereby charges remain in place for those in receipt of concessionary places. I agreed with this recommendation on the basis that those applying for concessionary transport are making a conscious decision to do so, understand that they are not eligible for school transport and understand the implications of this choice at the

time of application.

The report also recommended that the number of concessionary places should be reduced in line with the rules introduced in 2012 on a phased basis. Previous plans to advance this option were put on hold, pending the completion of the review.

However upon consideration of the review and following discussions with the Cross Party Working Group which I established to feed into the review, I decided that there should be no planned programme of downsizing in the coming years except in line with normal operational decisions within the current scheme.

The terms of the School Transport Scheme are applied equitably on a national basis.

*Question No. 35 answered with Question No. 28.*

### **Post-Leaving Certificate Courses Availability**

36. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the plans in place to improve the regional distribution of PLC, post-leaving certificate, courses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4685/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** Last month I published the ESRI evaluation of the PLC programme along with the SOLAS response, which sets out 45 recommendations to address the findings of the evaluation and improve the quality of the learner experience, learner outcomes and overall programme efficiency.

A SOLAS led PLC Programme Improvement Advisory Committee, comprised of PLC partners, will shortly be established by SOLAS to oversee development and implementation of a three year programme improvement plan, based on the recommendations set out in the SOLAS response. These include a review of the geographic distribution of PLC places in the context of the overall FET provision available to meet the needs of learners and employers in each ETB catchment area, taking into account a number of factors including population and deprivation index.

### **Post-Leaving Certificate Courses**

37. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the evaluation of PLC, post-leaving certificate, programme provision published by the ESRI in January 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4896/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** Last month I published the ESRI report along with the SOLAS response on the evaluation of the PLC programme. The ESRI report provides a solid evidence base to inform future policy development for the programme. It will ensure that provision is planned to meet the needs of learners and employers, taking into account the changed context, particularly in the labour market, since the PLC programme was established in the mid 80s.

The evaluation confirms the positive role played by PLC courses in providing education for a diverse range of learners, highlighting that on average PLC learners are 16% more likely to be employed and 27% more likely to have progressed to higher education, than those who left education with the Leaving Certificate alone. It also points to a greater need to develop systems to ensure that PLC courses focused on the labour market are aligned with employer require-

ments and are responsive to changing labour market needs.

Arising from the evaluation, SOLAS will shortly establish the PLC Programme Improvement Advisory Committee, comprised of PLC partners, to oversee development and implementation of a three year programme improvement plan. Based on the recommendations set out in the SOLAS response, implementation of the plan will ensure delivery of high quality education and training supporting learners to achieve their progression and employment goals.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

38. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the project brief for the building works at a school (details supplied) has been finalised; the commencement date of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4660/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that a project for St. Molaga's National School is included in my Department's Capital Programme to primarily replace existing temporary accommodation with permanent accommodation. In that regard officials in my Department are currently preparing the project brief which will facilitate the progression of the project into Architectural Planning, including the appointment of a Design Team. In this context I can confirm that a meeting has been arranged with the school authorities for early February in relation to their project.

In the interim I am pleased to advise that my Department has approved additional temporary accommodation to meet the school's immediate accommodation needs.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

39. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for sanctioning improvements to schools (details supplied) in County Donegal; his further plans for providing a new school building for two other schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4663/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy of the current position in respect of each of the four schools referred to.

In regard to the first school referenced, I can confirm that the school applied for funding under my Department's Emergency Works Scheme in respect of structural works. My Department has recently received the consultant's report requested for the works involved. This is currently under consideration and my Department will be in further contact with the school authorities on the matter as soon as possible.

In regard to the second school referred to, I can confirm that an application under the Additional School Accommodation scheme was received and assessed in my Department. In that instance the application for additional resource teaching spaces was not approved as it was determined there was no deficit of accommodation for the current staffing level. Separately, an appeal in respect of an unsuccessful application for mechanical works under the Summer Works Scheme is under consideration and my Department will notify the school authorities directly of the outcome once the appeal process concludes.

I wish to advise the Deputy that an application under the Emergency Works Scheme, for essential roof repairs, for the third school mentioned was granted in January. In addition, the Deputy will be aware my Department has included a major capital project for this school in the

6 year Capital Programme to provide a new two-storey eight classroom school on the existing site. This project has commenced Stage 1, Preliminary Design State, of the Architectural Planning Process - the Stage 1 submission has yet to be submitted by my Department.

Finally, in respect of the final school referenced, I wish to advise that a major project is at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2b (Detailed Design), which includes the application for statutory approvals and the preparation of tender document. In this regard, all statutory approvals have been secured.

The Stage 2b submission has been reviewed by my Department and comments issued to the school and its Design Team in December 2017. The Department has requested confirmations from the Design Team in respect of Tender Documents being complete, correct and in compliance with DoES and Building Control (Amendment) Regulations (BC(A)R) tender documentation requirements.

Upon receipt of the requested confirmations, the Department will revert to the school with regard to the further progression of the project.

### **Education and Training Boards Funding**

40. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 103 of 18 January 2018, if his attention has been drawn to the fact that other education and training boards that have funded church youth leadership schemes for roles within a church; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4900/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Deputy will be aware that I have sent a follow-up reply in relation to Parliamentary Question No. 103 2013 of 18 January 2018 in which I indicated that I would ask for a review to be conducted into participation by students in certain youth leadership programmes.

The Deputy may also be aware that the representative body for the sector, Education and Training Boards Ireland, has established a working group which is considering, on a broad basis, issues related to religion in ETBs. This may be an appropriate mechanism to consider the issues raised by the Deputy and the question of conducting a review in the light of changes in the composition of the student body and the need to ensure an inclusive environment for all students. My officials will bring same to the attention of that group.

My Department is currently working closely with the group on the preparation of a circular that will provide guidance to ETB Post Primary schools on the arrangements that should apply for students wishing to opt out of religious instruction or worship.

### **Capital Expenditure Programme**

41. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is satisfied that schools infrastructure planning is keeping pace with demographic changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4686/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Ireland has experienced a significant bulge in pupil enrolments going through our schools. This has seen a significant expansion in the rate of provision of new school places and this puts a high demand on the Department's capital budgets. Since 2011, some 340 major school projects and over 120,000 new and replacement places have been provided.

My Department's capital programme continues to address the challenges posed by a rapidly-increasing school population. To meet this demographic challenge, my Department's Capital Investment Programme (2016-2021), details the school projects that are being progressed through the architectural planning process. The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified.

We are building more schools and providing more additional school places than ever before. This reflects the priority which this Government is putting on education.

In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas. My Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. The GIS uses data from a range of sources.

The nationwide demographic exercises involving all school planning areas at primary and post-primary level, which will determine where additional school accommodation will be needed in the future, is ongoing at the moment. My Department is currently factoring into the demographic exercises critical updated data including updated enrolment data and up-to-date information on additional residential development from local authorities. The 2017/18 provisional enrolment data has just recently been made available and provides an important update on the available data which will inform the outcome of the demographic exercises. It is anticipated that decisions based on the review will be announced in the coming weeks.

In addition, my Department is included among the prescribed bodies to whom local authorities are statutorily obliged to send draft development and local area plans or proposed variations to development plans for comment and observations. This enables local authorities to reserve future school sites in areas designated for proposed housing development.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

42. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the delivery of a school (details supplied); and the timeframe for same. [4643/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy will be aware, a building project to provide permanent accommodation for the school in question is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme.

My Department has been working with the local authority to acquire the site on which the school is currently located. It is intended to progress the building project for the school into the architectural planning process shortly. In this regard, a schedule of accommodation and project brief is currently being finalised.

My Department has met with the school authority to appraise them of the current position and my officials will continue to liaise directly with the school in the context of progressing the new school building project.

### **Teachers' Remuneration**

43. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of reintroducing the island and Gaeltacht allowances for primary and post-primary teachers on payrolls operated by his Department and those employed by the education and training board;

his plans to reintroduce same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4648/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As a consequence of the economic crisis, there was a need to enact a number of measures to reduce public expenditure so as to stabilise the country's public finances.

The Government approved a number of measures relating to public service allowances following a public service-wide review of allowances and premium payments conducted by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. As a result of the Government decision, certain allowances were withdrawn for new beneficiaries with effect from 1 February 2012. The details are set out in Circular 08/2013.

Any person who was in receipt of the relevant allowances on 31 January 2012 will continue to be paid that allowance except where that teacher ceases that job role or changes school or employer on or after 1 February 2012. Where a teacher is redeployed under the agreed redeployment scheme, this will not be regarded as a cessation.

The annual cost of restoring the allowances referred to by the Deputy to new entry teachers in Primary, Voluntary Secondary and Community and Comprehensive schools would be in the region of €0.38m, comprised of €0.37m to restore the Gaeltacht Allowance and €0.01m to restore the Island Allowance (Primary only).

This information relates to the teachers paid on payrolls operated by my Department. The information relating to teachers employed in Education and Training Boards would have to be obtained from the individual ETBs.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

44. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on the provision of school buildings and facilities in Dublin 15 and the Pelletstown, Navan Road and Ashtown areas of Dublin 7; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4894/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I am pleased to advise the Deputy that my Department's capital programme continues to address the challenge posed by a rapidly increasing school population. To meet this demographic challenge, my Department's Capital Investment Programme (2016-2021), details the school projects that are being progressed to meet this need. The capital programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed.

Since 2015, three new primary schools, Pelletstown Educate Together National School, Scoil Sinéad National School and Broombridge Educate Together National School have been established in the areas referred to by the Deputy to meet demographic growth.

The 6 Year Construction Programme also includes building projects at five further schools in the area, Mary Help of Christian's National School, St. John Bosco Junior and Senior Boys' National Schools, North Dublin Muslim School and Holy Family School for the Deaf.

While there was no requirement for a new post primary school in the area referred to by the Deputy, a new 1,000 pupil post-primary school opened in September 2017 in temporary accommodation in the adjoining school planning area of Carpenterstown/Castleknock.

The nationwide demographic exercises for all school planning areas at primary and post-

primary level, including the area referred to by the Deputy is ongoing. The outcome will determine where additional school accommodation will be needed in the future. It is anticipated that decisions based on this exercise will be announced shortly.

### **Schools Building Projects**

45. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which a company's (details supplied) collapse might affect the school building programme here in the short, medium or long term; if specific action needs to be taken to minimise the impact in the medium or long term; if projects here which are the subject of normal conciliation are due for payment by his Department in the short term; if the process in this regard can be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4889/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The liquidation of the company referred to by the Deputy does not directly affect any school building projects other than the Schools Bundle 5 Public Private Partnership (PPP) programme.

In the case of PPPs, the Department's contract is with a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) rather than with a construction contractor. The SPV then enters into a separate contract with a construction company to procure the construction element of the contract. In this way, it differs from traditional school building projects.

In particular, where a liquidation event arises with the construction contractor in a PPP project, it is the responsibility of the PPP operator to ensure that construction is completed. The PPP operator is incentivised to resolve the issue as quickly as possible, as the State does not commence payments under the contract until construction is complete.

In regard to conciliation, this is a form of dispute resolution which is included in the suite of Public Works contracts under which all major school building projects (except for PPPs) are delivered. The terms of the conciliation process, including the rights of the respective parties and the timeframes for the processing of conciliations, are laid out clearly in the Public Works Contract. My Department adheres strictly to these provisions in the processing of any conciliation on a school building project.

Dispute mechanisms in PPPs are set out in the Project Agreement and are different to public works contracts given the complexities associated with PPPs. In any event, responsibility for the resolution of disputes with sub-contractors in the context of PPPs rests with the SPV.

*Question No. 46 answered with Question No. 29.*

### **Irish Language**

47. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he is taking to meet the shortage of second level teachers with Irish, particularly those teaching languages and science subjects in the Irish medium and Gaeltacht schools. [4652/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** One of the aims of my Department's Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022 is to increase the supply of newly qualified teachers with the competence to deliver high quality Irish-medium education in schools, particularly in Gaeltacht school settings. The Policy also seeks to improve the quality of teaching through Irish to ensure that existing teachers' Irish-language proficiency and pedagogical knowledge, skills and competence are enhanced to a level that equips them to deliver high

quality Irish-medium education.

In this context, my Department has been working with the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) to develop a Request for Tenders (RFT) for the design and delivery of two new Irish-medium teacher education programmes, comprising a full-time four-year Irish-medium initial teacher education B.Ed. (primary teaching) programme and a part-time two-year Irish-medium M.Ed. postgraduate blended learning programme. It is expected that the successful tenderer(s) will be announced in the coming weeks. The M.Ed., which will provide up to 30 places annually, is due to commence from September 2018, while the B.Ed, with also up to 30 places annually, is due to commence from September 2019.

Also in implementing the Policy, my Department made arrangements for the secondment from September 2017 of two additional teaching posts to the Máistir Gairmiúil san Oideachas (MGO) programme at NUIG, which is an Irish-medium post-primary ITE programme. This initiative will allow for an increase in the supply of Irish-medium post-primary teachers through a range of measures including the upskilling of student teachers, outreach, online and blended-learning opportunities in the second year of the programme.

I will shortly be announcing the establishment of a Teacher Supply Steering Group to consider teacher supply issues at primary and post-primary levels, including the provision of adequate numbers of teachers in key subject areas such as languages and STEM subjects. The Group will consult with key stakeholders.

### **Schools Building Projects**

48. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps he is taking to address the shortage of primary school places in the catchment area of south-west Swords with a view to the 2018 enrolments; and his plans to provide a long term solution to the ongoing shortage of places to meet the needs of the community. [4659/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In order to plan for school provision, the demographic data for the Swords school planning area, as with other school planning areas nationwide, is being kept under ongoing review by my Department to take account of updated child benefit data and updated enrolment data. It is anticipated that decisions based on these exercises will be announced in the near future.

As the Deputy is aware, there are a total of 11 schools enrolling junior infant classes serving the Swords area, comprising 8 Catholic schools, one Gaelscoil, one Educate Together school and one Church of Ireland school. My Department is aware of the pressure on school places in recent years in the Swords school planning area. In that regard, my Department is monitoring the expected enrolment position in the school planning area with the aim of ensuring that there is adequate accommodation to cater for the demand for places in September 2018.

### **State Examinations Commission**

49. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason for the State Examinations Commission annual deficit tripling during 2017 to more than €2.2 million; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4689/18]

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

aminations. In view of this I have forwarded your question to the Commission for direct reply to you.

### **Teachers' Remuneration**

50. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the cost of reinstating pay equality for teachers within the public sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [53244/17]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration for public servants to start. I negotiated together with my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform a 15-22% pay increase for new teachers. The agreements to date have restored an estimated 75% of the difference in pay for more recently recruited teachers and deliver full equality at later points in the scale.

As a result of the changes I negotiated together with my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, the current starting salary of a new teacher is €35,958 and from 1 October 2020 onwards will be €37,692. If full equalisation was achieved the starting salary for a post-primary teacher from 1 October 2020 would be €43,879 and for a primary teacher would be €41,511.

Differential pay scales were introduced by the then Government in 2010. It must be borne in mind that the pay reduction for post-2011 entrants to the public service applied to all public servants and not just teachers, and that any restoration of these measures in respect of teachers would be expected to be applied elsewhere across the public service. While I am not in a position to provide an estimate of the total cost of restoring all post-1 January 2011 entrants in all of the public service to the pre-2011 pay scale arrangements, I can say that in the case of education and training sector employees, including teachers, the estimated current full year cost would be in the order of €130 million. Clearly, the cost across the entire public service would be substantially higher.

To have gone further than the pay increases that have been negotiated for 2018 would mean I would have had less money available to hire over 1,000 extra SNAs in 2018, and over 1,000 extra teachers in 2018.

Any further negotiation on new entrant pay is a cross sectorial issue, not just an issue for the education sector. The Government also supports the gradual, negotiated repeal of the FEMPI legislation, having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

A commitment is included in the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 to consider the issue of newly qualified pay within 12 months of the commencement of the Agreement. That process has now commenced with a first meeting on 12 October 2017. The three teacher unions attended that first meeting.

In addition, the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 provides that within 3 months of the passing of the Act, my colleague the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform will prepare and lay before the Oireachtas a report on the cost of and a plan in dealing with pay equalisation for new entrants to the public service.

### **Schools Building Projects**

51. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the action being taken to ensure adequate educational capacity exists to cater for future demand in view of the planned population and housing growth on the Donabate and Portrane peninsula; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4656/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas. My Department uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) to identify where the pressure for school places across these areas will arise. The GIS uses data from a range of sources, including the Central Statistics Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Department of Social Protection and my Department's own databases. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post-primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed.

Where demographic data indicates that additional provision is required, the delivery of such additional provision is dependent on the particular circumstances of each case and may, depending on the circumstances, be provided through either one, or a combination of, the following:

Utilising existing unused capacity within a school or schools;

Extending the capacity of a school or schools;

Provision of a new school or schools.

For school planning purposes, Donabate and Portrane are located in the Donabate school planning area. As with other school planning areas nationwide, the demographic data for Donabate school planning area is being kept under review by my Department to take account of updated child benefit and school enrolment data. My Department is currently engaging with local authorities in relation to additional residential development in all counties as part of this review. It is anticipated that decisions based on the demographic exercises will be announced shortly.

### **Island Communities**

52. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to address the ongoing challenges facing island schools in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4819/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I am aware of the additional challenges faced by schools on the islands. In view of these challenges, in Budget 2017 I set out different appointment and retention figures for the appointment and retention of mainstream teachers in primary schools.

I have received a report (dated September 2017) from the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Irish, the Gaeltacht and the Islands in which the Committee sets out its views concerning the challenges faced by schools on the islands. I have asked my officials to examine the report and the needs of all island schools, including post primary schools. The work of the group commenced in late 2017 and will progress in 2018. The working group will consider the report and see what assistance can be provided to these schools as a way forward.

### **Regional Development Initiatives**

53. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in

which his Department can help drive regional development nationally and in the north-west area through the regional skills forum. [4816/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Each of the 9 Regional Skills Fora which provide regional skills data for a number of sources including the National Skills Council, encourages greater collaboration between a number of relevant stakeholders in each region including enterprise and the Education and Training System. One of the functions of each Forum is to identify and respond to existing and future skills needs at regional level in order to maximise regional development.

In the North-west Region in 2017, among the sectors that have successfully engaged with the North West Regional Skills Forum include, ICT, Retail, Manufacturing, Transport, Hospitality and Financial Services sectors and over 60% of engagement between the Forum and enterprise was with Small, Medium and Micro enterprises.

As part of the Skills for Growth project which is being led by my Department in co-junction with Enterprise Ireland, Enterprise Ireland is providing tailored workshops to its client companies to help them to identify the skills needs of their own organisation by using the Skills for Growth skills audit tool kit. Skills data from these audits are then made available for the Regional Skills Forum in that region. Spotlight on Skills is the title for these workshops and a workshop has recently taken place in the North-west region. The Skills for Growth initiative will increase the quality and quantity of data available on skills needs in individual enterprises, to allow for enhanced engagement between enterprise, education and training providers and other relevant members of each Regional Skills Fora.

In addition, in the higher education sector, considerable progress has been made under the Technological Universities process, including in relation to the Connaught Ulster Alliance, consisting of Galway Mayo Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology Sligo and Letterkenny Institute of Technology. Technological Universities will have a vital role in driving regional development.

### **Teacher Recruitment**

54. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps being taken to address the acute lack of availability of substitute teachers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4647/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Additional investment has allowed the successful recruitment of over 5,000 additional teachers in the last two years. Since 2012/2013, there are 8,900 more teachers in our schools. No other part of the public service has seen this sort of growth, which is testament to the Government's commitment to education and its importance in fulfilling our national ambitions.

The numbers of graduates from initial teacher education (ITE) programmes have also remained broadly constant. Over 8,000 primary and 7,800 second level teachers have graduated in the last five years and in 2018 it is estimated that approximately 1,870 primary and 1,523 post primary teachers will graduate.

However, primary schools in particular have reported difficulty in recruiting substitute teachers to cover for short term or temporary absences and I fully acknowledge the concerns that have been expressed about teacher supply,

I have already announced a number of measures to increase the pool of teachers available

to schools, in particular to fill short term vacancies, including informing all teachers retiring in 2017 that in order to remain eligible for employment in a state funded teaching post for a period of more than five consecutive days or to supervise the State examinations, a teacher must maintain his/her registration with the Teaching Council.

I have also recently announced the temporary suspension of the limits for employment for a teacher on career break. Schools have also been reminded that, in considering career break applications, the needs of pupils should take precedence and they must take account of the availability of appropriate qualified replacement teachers.

The Deputy should note that I will shortly be announcing the establishment of a Teacher Supply Steering Group to develop a strategy for teacher supply. As part of its remit, the Group will consult with key stakeholders.

In 2018 I will also ask the Teaching Council to review subject criteria and processes for assessing overseas qualifications and to engage more with graduate fairs and final year students.

### **Third Level Fees**

55. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the appeal options available to students who are not satisfied with a third level college's decision to charge them international student fees. [4856/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Where undergraduate students do not qualify for free fees they are required to pay fees to their higher education institution at either an 'EU rate' or a higher 'Non-EU rate'.

As autonomous institutions, the determination of the fee rate applicable for individual students is a matter for the higher education institutions.

Due to a particular concern regarding people who have had, for occupational or economic reasons, to move abroad, requiring them to take their children out of the Irish education system in the process, in March 2014 the Department requested that the Higher Education Authority (HEA) advise the higher education sector that full-time undergraduate students who:

hold EU/EEA/Swiss nationality but do not meet the residency clause of the Free Fees Initiative; and

have completed five academic years of study (at either primary or post-primary level) in an EU/EEA/Swiss State; and

commence their first undergraduate course of study in an approved institution here from the following academic year onwards,

should be charged the EU rate of fee rather than the higher non-EU rate by their higher education institution.

This approach was implemented for new students from the commencement of the 2014/15 academic year and it is a matter for the institutions to apply this policy to such students. Higher education institutions are autonomous bodies and, are therefore responsible for the determination of the level of fees payable by students who are not eligible for free fees under my Department's Free Fees Scheme.

The Department is not aware of any cases where any particular higher education institution

has not agreed to the Department's request.

The final decision on this issue is a matter for the individual higher education institution.

*Question No. 56 answered with Question No. 28.*

### **Further Education and Training Programmes Provision**

57. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to include as part of lifelong learning proposals, the development of a nationwide learner centred flexible and affordable high level competency based learning collaborative initiative within Irish higher education which would involve multiple community based stakeholders (details supplied). [4684/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** This Government has set a target of ensuring that 10% of people aged 25-64 engage in lifelong learning by 2020. Life-long learning can comprise formal, non-formal and informal learning. The Adult Learning BA (ALBA) programme was a learner-centred, flexible and competence based programme which was accredited by Dublin City University (DCU) and offered at All Hallows College in Drumcondra. When All Hallows College closed, DCU facilitated remaining students to complete their studies and the programme ceased in 2017.

I received a copy of the research report on the ALBA programme and an official from my Department met with some members of the ALBA team in December last. The Department is considering the practices and approaches outlined in the report, along with other examples of adult learning initiatives, in order to assess the range of methodologies which may be offered to achieve our targets for adult and continuing education.

### **Schools Building Contractors**

58. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on a matter (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4909/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In respect of the Schools Bundle 5 PPP programme, which includes the school referred to by the Deputy, a contract exists between my Department and the Principal contractor, Inspiredspaces. Inspiredspaces is the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) responsible for the design, construction, finance, operation and maintenance of the programme.

The company referred to by the Deputy has been a 50% shareholder in the SPV. The other shareholder in the SPV is the Dutch Infrastructure Fund (DIF).

The Principal contractor for the SB5 programme continues to be Inspiredspaces. Sub-contractors on the project are employed by Inspiredspaces in that respect or indirectly by Inspiredspaces through other sub-contractors.

It is a matter for all sub-contractors to agree terms and conditions and a schedule of payments with their direct employer. The enforcement of contractual rights is a matter for individual suppliers. As such the Department has no authority to intervene in these cases.

The Dutch Infrastructure Fund is currently developing a rectification plan to ensure completion of the school buildings in as timely a manner as possible. The outcome of this process will provide greater clarity for all involved in the individual projects.

### **School Guidelines on Mental Health**

59. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views regarding claims from primary school principals that increasing anxiety among school children in primary schools has emerged as one of the biggest problems facing them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4645/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I can assure that Deputy that both I and my Department are aware of the vital role that schools play in providing a safe, protective and nurturing environment for children and young people in inuring them to the increasing stresses of daily life.

My Department promotes a comprehensive and whole-school approach in schools to the promotion of well-being and positive mental health focusing on the entire school community, as well as groups and individual young people with identified need. This spans the curriculum in schools and in particular the Aistear and primary school Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curricula, whole-school ethos, quality of teaching, learning and assessment, student support and the provision of professional development for teachers. It also involves accessing other supports such as educational psychology services. Additionally, schools engage in a wide range of sport and cultural activities which provide an important opportunity for students to experience success and personal growth. The whole staff shares responsibility for general student well-being. The Well-being in Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (2015) provide a Framework for schools to present in an integrated way the existing elements of good practice to promote social and emotional learning, and mental health and direct then to new practices as appropriate. They provide clear information for schools and for agencies supporting schools on how to address issues of social emotional learning. The European wide HSE supported, Health Promoting School Process (HSP) is also outlined, and the Well-being Guidelines show how the HSP can be introduced to schools to complement existing good practice. The Guidelines outline how schools support young people through early intervention and prevention, modelled on the NEPS Continuum of Support tiered approach. The Guidelines build on the significant work already taking place in schools, including through the systematic implementation of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum.

The Guidelines highlight the vital role schools play in providing a protective environment for young people which can counter risk factors. Additionally having a whole school approach which fosters important links with the wider school community, and agencies which support schools, is key to successful implementation of the Guidelines.

They provide information for schools on the supports services that are currently available. Schools are advised to seek this support when in developing the whole school approach. It is important that this support is well coordinated and that schools are clear about the responsibilities of the support agencies.

The Guidelines advise that in the event of pupils presenting with mental health difficulties which are above and beyond the school's capacity and ability to support, school authorities should identify and access the referral pathways for the various primary and secondary health-care services in their particular area. My Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) is available to advise schools on the matter. Referrals should, of course, be

undertaken with Parental or Guardian consent and collaboration, except in an exceptional situation where there may be child protection issues. In normal circumstances referral to Clinical Psychology Services and to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is made through the student's G.P.

My Department's Action Plan for Education 2017 promotes well-being as one of its key goals. The actions relating to well-being and mental health in the primary school sector include:

Delivery of a national programme to support all schools to implement the national Wellbeing in Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (2015).

Increasing the capacity of NEPS: an enhanced educational psychological service to schools, through the appointment of an additional 10 educational psychologists. The focus of this additional support will be on extending the roll-out of teacher programmes to DEIS schools that build capacity to promote social and emotional competence, resilience and school connectedness in all learners.

As stated above the Guidelines themselves form a framework within which a broad range of existing processes and practices can be rationalised within schools and brought to bear within the context of a cogent well-being and mental health support for pupils in schools. Support to the school community in this regard is being provided from a number of sources within my Department including the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST).

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

60. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position with regard to the building of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4664/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy will probably be aware, the project to which he refers has been devolved for delivery to the local Education and Training Board (ETB).

Planning permission has been received for the project which is at detailed design stage. In this regard, the Stage 2b submission was recently submitted to my Department for consideration.

My Department is currently reviewing its programme for capital expenditure in 2018 and 2019 and timing of the progression of the project to the next stage will be considered in that context.

### **DEIS Administration**

61. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the transparency of the school selection process for the DEIS scheme will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4688/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The identification process for the DEIS Programme has adopted a new scientific approach for the selection of schools for

inclusion in DEIS. As you are aware, the identification of levels of disadvantage in schools is based on data provided by schools themselves, combined with publically available Small Area of Population Census data, as represented by the Pobal HP Index. The data is applied uniformly across all the schools in the country. The approach taken was informed by the Review of the DEIS programme in 2016. A detailed account of the methodology adopted, is available on my Department's website at

*<http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Identification-Process.pdf>*.

As the Deputy will also be aware a further assessment of all schools is currently underway. This will take account of updated school data as provided by schools for the current school year combined with the updated Pobal HP Index of Deprivation, based on Small Area Population statistics derived from the 2016 National Census.

The overall implementation of DEIS Plan 2017 is now underway and I have no plans to conduct any further reviews of the programme, including the Identification Process for schools, at this time.

### **Schools Building Contractors**

62. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will report on the position of those working on projects that were being undertaken with the involvement of a company (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4898/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In respect of the Schools Bundle 5 PPP programme, a contract exists between my Department and the Principal contractor, Inspiredspaces. Inspiredspaces is the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) responsible for the design, construction, finance, operation and maintenance of the schools.

The company referred to by the Deputy has been a 50% shareholder in the SPV. The other shareholder in the SPV is the Dutch Infrastructure Fund (DIF).

The Principal contractor for the SB5 programme continues to be Inspiredspaces. Sub-contractors on the project are employed by Inspiredspaces in that respect or indirectly by Inspiredspaces through other sub-contractors.

The Dutch Infrastructure Fund is currently working to develop a rectification plan to ensure delivery of the schools as quickly as possible. Once the details of the rectification plan have been confirmed by DIF, this will provide greater clarity for all involved in the individual projects.

### **School Accommodation**

63. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to deal with the crisis facing persons at a school (details supplied) in Dublin 8 in view of the fact that in September 2018 there will be no classroom facilities for special education teaching and just one junior infant class enrolled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4842/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that the school concerned is located in a former primary school building that was secured as part of Government policy on school divesting.

The property is subject to a 10 year lease between the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST) and the Minister for Education and Skills.

As the Deputy is aware, the school has submitted an application to my Department for additional accommodation to facilitate expansion.

However, the lease requires the consent of ERST to place this accommodation on the school site. In this regard, my Department is currently engaging with ERST to secure this consent and expects a response from ERST shortly.

Department officials have also been liaising with the school principal recently and have advised the principal that the accommodation will be approved as soon as this consent is granted.

### **Broadband Service Provision**

64. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to bring forward new proposals to ensure greater access to broadband in schools; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4687/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Through the Schools Broadband Access Programme the Department provides for the supply of internet connectivity for all recognised primary and post primary schools, and some 98% of schools are included in this scheme. All post-primary schools and some special schools are now included in the 100Mbps programme.

The policy of my Department is to offer the best quality connectivity to all schools in line with the technical solutions available in the market and financial constraints. Broadband capacity can vary due to geographical location and local infrastructure, and thus impact on the service that can be provided.

Under the current primary schools programme the Department continually reviews the availability of services and upgrades schools where the opportunity arises, in line with contractual and budgetary requirements. A recent drawdown from the Framework of Providers of Broadband Services saw some 1,100 primary schools awarded download speeds of 30Mbps or greater (the baseline download speed required under the National Broadband Plan). Those schools have now been upgraded to that connectivity. This represents more than one third of all primary schools. This is a significant improvement over recent years, given that less than 100 primary schools were on those speeds in 2012. Further schools are likely to be upgraded to those speeds in 2018, through EIR's 300K Rural Deployment commitment.

The need to improve broadband connectivity to primary schools is recognised in the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020, and as noted access to high speed broadband is one of the indicators identified in the Digital Strategy Action Plan. An interdepartmental working group has been established to determine how best to address broadband connectivity to primary schools in collaboration with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, in the context of the National Broadband Plan and the Intervention Strategy, and proposed industry provision.

### **Legislative Process**

65. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the Education (Admissions to Schools) Bill 2016 will resume Fourth Stage in Dáil Éireann; if the prom-

ised amendment to remove the baptism barrier will be included; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4821/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy will be aware the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 was published in July 2016. The Bill which passed Committee Stage on 28th June 2017 and will shortly proceed to Report Stage, is an important piece of legislation which strives to create a new more parent-friendly, equitable and consistent approach to how school admissions policy operates for the almost 4,000 primary and post-primary schools in this country.

In relation to the role of religion in school admissions, in early 2017, I stated that I believe that it is unfair that preference is given by publicly funded religious schools to children of their own religion who might live some distance away, ahead of children of a different religion or of no religion who live close to the school.

I also stated that I believe that it is unfair that parents, who might otherwise not do so, feel pressure to baptise their children in order to gain admission to the local school and have expressed my intention to reform the school admissions system in relation to the role that religion can play in that process.

I ran a public consultation process from 24th January to 20th March 2017 on this matter and held a public forum last May on the role of Religion in Primary School Admissions. I outlined my intention to make changes in the first instance in respect of the primary school system. It was noted in the consultation paper that any changes need only apply in respect of oversubscribed schools (approximately 20% of schools). In respect of all other schools, the practice is to admit all applicants. This will become law following the enactment of the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill – when schools will be required to admit every child who applies.

Officials from my Department are currently engaging with the Office of the Attorney General on the development of legislative proposals on a number of matters, including the matter referred to by the Deputy, which I hope to bring forward to Government for approval shortly.

The Bill will proceed to Report stage once these amendments have been finalised.

### **Defence Forces Medical Services**

66. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the general medical qualifications held by each of the Defence Forces medical officers involved in malaria chemoprophylaxis. [4988/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** All Defence Forces Medical Officers must possess at a minimum the professional qualifications of Medical Bachelor (M.B.), Bachelor of Surgery (B.CH), Bachelor in the Art of Obstetrics (B.A.O) or equivalent. They must hold current, full registration with the Medical Council of Ireland. By date of entry into the Defence Forces they must also have had three (3) years post graduate experience.

I am informed by the military authorities that all Defence Forces Medical Officers have a clinical commitment to patients, and as such could be involved in the preparation and examination of personnel for overseas deployment which may include malaria chemoprophylaxis.

### **Internal Audits**

67. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if his Department has completed an external quality assurance assessment of its internal audit function as required by the Institute of Internal Audit standards that were introduced in 2012 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5108/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** My Department is committed to undertaking an independent quality assurance assessment of its internal audit function and arrangements are currently being finalised to go to tender to obtain this service.

### Apprenticeship Data

68. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of persons enrolled in apprenticeships in his Department and State agencies under his remit, by gender, in tabular form; and if he will list each such apprenticeship. [5254/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** There are currently five civilian employees undergoing apprentice training with my Department. Details of the grades and gender as sought by the Deputy are set out in the following table.

Apprenticeship	Gender
Fitter x 3	Male
Electrician	Male
Welder	Male

### Internal Audits

69. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his Department has completed an external quality assurance assessment of its internal audit function as required by the Institute of Internal Audit standards that were introduced in 2012 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5112/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** An external quality assessment of the Internal Audit function in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is currently underway and will be completed in February 2018. In November 2012, following extensive consultation with Heads of Internal Audit, Audit Committees and Senior Management across the range of Vote Holders, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform determined that the Institute of Internal Auditors International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing (IIA Standards) should apply across all Irish Government Departments and other Vote Holders. These Standards require that an external assessment of an internal audit function must be conducted periodically.

### Apprenticeship Data

70. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of persons enrolled in apprenticeships in his Department and State agencies under his remit, by gender, in tabular form; and if he will list each such apprenticeship. [5258/18]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** There are no apprentices enrolled in my Department and there is no scheme in place in this Department that facilitates apprenticeships.

In recent years, the Department has offered a limited number of 11 month internships for graduates in the areas of human rights, conflict resolution and legal affairs. Such internships, when they arise, are advertised through the careers offices of Irish third-level institutions and also on our website at [www.dfa.ie](http://www.dfa.ie). Internship positions also arise from time to time with the Department's Development Cooperation Division, which administers the Irish Aid programme.

### **Stock Markets Regulation**

71. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the fact that when a company bought shares in a bank (details supplied) in 2013 it had access to loan-loss data that was not available to other retail shareholders in view of the fact that it was the bank's policy at the time not to reveal all losses to shareholders; the steps that were taken to avoid the potential for insider trading to have occurred during that transaction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5011/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I can confirm for the Deputy that my attention has not been drawn to any such scenario as described in this question.

In relation to the Deputy's assertion that it was the bank's policy not to reveal all losses to shareholders, I would highlight that the rules relating to the correct level of provisioning, and consequent losses, are determined by the relevant accounting standards. It is the responsibility of the board of the bank to ensure that these rules have been properly applied and that this is subject to external audit review. Nothing has been brought to my attention to suggest that the bank has not applied these rules correctly.

Finally, the Deputy has asked what steps were taken to avoid the potential for insider trading. As a publicly listed company, the bank is required to comply with all Market Abuse regulations and I am not aware of any issues in this regard. However, should the Deputy have concerns, she should contact the Central Bank of Ireland which is the appropriate authority to investigate such a matter.

### **Tracker Mortgage Examination**

72. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the reason persons with a bank (details supplied) who have been informed they have been impacted by the tracker mortgage scandal have not had their rate corrected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5059/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Central Bank has advised that the Tracker Mortgage Examination is on-going. However, it also advises that it is not in a position to comment on its supervisory engagements with individual lenders. Nevertheless, the Bank continues to engage with and challenge all lenders to ensure that they identify all tracker impacted customers in a timely manner and to ensure that all lenders are acting in their customers' best interests.

It is important to note that it is only when lenders have completed the customer identification process that it can be known with certainty if customers are impacted. As set out in the Examination framework, when groups of impacted customers are identified, in the first instance, the lender must stop charging the incorrect rate of interest on the customer's account. The lender must then communicate this to the customer to ensure that any further customer detriment is stopped as early as possible. Once a full review of the customer's account is complete, following external independent third party assurance, the lender will then issue a letter to the

customer explaining the nature of the error, the correct rate to apply to the customer's account and information on the next steps in the Tracker Examination, including the redress and compensation process.

### **Repatriation of Money**

73. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Finance the implications the recent repatriation of a company's (details supplied) \$38 billion tax bill to the US will have for the company's potential tax liability of €13 billion, held in escrow pending appeal of the August 2016 European Commission ruling, should the ongoing European Court of Justice case find in favour of the August 2016 ruling. [5098/18]

74. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on whether a company's (details supplied) potential tax liability of €13 billion will accrue here or the US should the European Court of Justice find in favour of the August 2016 European Commission ruling; and his further views on whether the moves at EU level towards territorial taxation will result in retrospective mechanisms being used by EU countries to ensure taxation due to them will be repatriated. [5099/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 73 and 74 together.

As the Deputy is aware, I am not at liberty, nor is it appropriate for me, to discuss the tax affairs of individual companies.

The Government profoundly disagrees with the European Commission's analysis in the Apple State Aid case.

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

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

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

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

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

Ireland has never accepted the Commission's analysis in the Apple State aid Decision.

However, we have always been clear that the Government is fully committed to ensuring

that recovery of the alleged Apple State aid takes place without delay and has committed significant resources to ensuring this is achieved as quickly as possible whilst ensuring that the interests of the Irish taxpayer are adequately protected.

Significant progress has been made on this complex issue and the establishment of an escrow fund, in compliance with all relevant Irish constitutional and European Union law requirements, is close to completion. Officials and experts from across the State have been engaged in intensive work to ensure that Ireland complies with all its recovery obligations as soon as possible.

*Question No. 74 answered with Question No. 73.*

### **Internal Audits**

75. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department has completed an external quality assurance assessment of its internal audit function as required by the Institute of Internal Audit standards that were introduced in 2012 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5111/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Internal and EU Audit Unit of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) provides an internal audit service to my Department on a shared service basis.

As required by the Internal Audit Standards launched by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in 2012, the Internal Audit Unit function underwent an External Quality Assessment (EQA) which was carried out in November 2015 by the Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors, the standard setting body for internal audit. The objective of the EQA was to provide an independent assessment of the effectiveness of the internal audit function as applied across the two Government Departments. This included considering the team's conformance to the International Professional Practices Framework (IPPF), the globally recognised standard for quality in Internal Auditing.

The overall assessment conclusion was that the internal audit function met the highest grade rating used by the Institute of Internal Auditors i.e. "generally conforms" to the IIA's professional standards. This means that the Internal Audit team may state in its audit reports that the work "has been performed in accordance with the IPPF".

### **Tax Code**

76. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance if DIRT is being applied and charged in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5182/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that their records do not indicate if DIRT is being applied or charged by the relevant financial institution on the person concerned. The person concerned should contact the relevant financial institution to establish if DIRT has been applied or charged. If it has, the person concerned may be entitled to a refund of some or all of the DIRT applied or charged.

### **Knowledge Development Box**

77. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the number of firms by size (details supplied) that have applied for the knowledge development box scheme for SMEs since being established, in tabular form. [5246/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The purpose of the Knowledge Development Box (KDB) is to encourage companies to develop intellectual property and thereby engage in substantive R&D operations that have a positive impact on the Irish economy. The KDB applies for accounting periods commencing on or after 1 January 2016. The claimant company has a period of up to 24 months to make a claim for KDB relief.

I am informed by Revenue that a small number of companies (fewer than 10) with accounting periods ended on or before 31 December 2016 have claimed KDB relief. Due to taxpayer confidentiality, Revenue cannot comment on the size or nature of the claimant companies to date. However, the tax cost of these claims to date is less than €5 million. It is possible that this cost could change due to the 24 month period available to claim the relief.

### **Tax Credits**

78. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the position regarding the establishment by the Revenue Commissioners of a research and development discussion group to consider the administrative burdens faced by those engaging with research and development tax initiatives in tandem with a new practice for SMEs regarding the qualifying science test; the estimated costs associated with setting up and maintaining this discussion group; and the number of part-time and full-time staff working in the Revenue Commissioners in a dedicated unit with respect to research and development tax related matters. [5247/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that there is a Research & Development (R&D) discussion group which reports to the Direct and Capital Taxes Sub-Committee of the Tax Administration Liaison Committee (TALC). The main purpose of the discussion group is to provide a forum for Revenue and representative organisations to raise and address issues affecting the operation of the R&D tax credit and the Knowledge Development Box (KDB). The group provides a platform for issues to be raised with Revenue, but also for Revenue to raise issues and concerns with representative bodies.

As with all TALC interactions, the relevant Revenue officers take part in the discussion group as part of their normal functions. All members of the group are there in a representative capacity. There is no cost associated with the setting up or maintaining the group.

Revenue does not have a dedicated unit exclusively looking after Research and Development matters. The R&D tax credit, like all other elements of corporation tax, is administered within the existing Revenue structures. This includes customer service to assist taxpayers to voluntarily comply with their tax obligations together with compliance and verification programmes to assess and manage risk. Where a risk is identified then a compliance intervention and any subsequent non-compliance will be dealt with in accordance with the Code of Practice for Revenue Audit and other Compliance Interventions. A small number of staff in the Revenue Legislative Service deals with the R&D tax credit and the KDB as part of a larger legislative workload.

This approach and the overall administration of the R&D tax credit by Revenue were extensively reviewed by the Comptroller and Auditor General and is set out under Chapter 14 of the 2015 Annual Report.

I am advised by Revenue that it has issued extensive guidance on the R&D Tax Credit most

recently in 2015. Additional guidance specifically to reduce the administrative burden for relatively small claims for SME's and micro-companies was issued in February 2017.

### **Apprenticeship Data**

79. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the number of persons enrolled in apprenticeships in his Department and State agencies under his remit by gender in tabular form; and if he will list each such apprenticeship. [5257/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I wish to inform the Deputy that my Department does not operate an apprenticeship programme. None of the Agencies under the remit of my Department has any persons currently enrolled in apprenticeships.

### **Tax Yield**

80. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of corporation tax revenue received in 2017 from the aircraft leasing and finance industry; the number of aircraft leasing and finance companies in existence here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5265/18]

81. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the amount of corporation tax revenue received in 2017 from digital and Internet companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5266/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 80 and 81 together.

I am informed by Revenue that initial analysis of 2017 data indicate that the net Corporation Tax receipts from the aircraft leasing and finance industry were in the region of €40 million. In relation to the number of aircraft leasing and finance companies, tax returns for 2015 (the latest full year available) indicate there are around 2,600 such companies operating in Ireland.

Regarding Question 5266-18, it is assumed that the Deputy is referring to the Corporation Tax associated with the digital or internet trade element of corporate profits. In the rapidly evolving digital economy, many companies increasingly trade in this environment. Corporation Tax returns do not separate out the digital and internet activities of companies from other activities within the same entity. I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that for this reason it is not possible presently to give a comprehensive estimate of the amount of Corporation Tax receipts from digital and internet companies. However, Revenue is reviewing whether further detail can be ascertained in relation to these activities. The Deputy may wish to note that a breakdown of receipts by broad industry sector is available on the Revenue website at

*<https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/receipts/receipts-sector.aspx>.*

### **Banking Sector**

82. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the progress State-supported banks have made on Payment Services Directive II, PSD2; the potential implications for not implementing the directive; the potential implications for non-compliance in time; and if he

will make a statement on the matter. [5267/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** In relation to the Payment Services Directive II (PSD2), I have received the following comments.

AIB

“AIB has implemented all aspects of PSD II which came into effect on 13 January 2018 and is on track to implement the remaining articles once the final Regulatory Technical Standards (RTS) has been published and its implementation date agreed.”

PTSB

“Permanent TSB implemented PSD2 on the 13th January 2018 and updated and communicated to customers the changes in Terms and Conditions accordingly.”

Statutory Instrument No. 6 of 2018 – European Union (Payment Services) Regulations 2018 – deals with PSD2. Section 134 sets out the penalties for offences under Statutory Instrument No. 6 which are listed under sections 126-131. Statutory Instrument No. 6 can be found at the following link:

*<http://www.finance.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/18012-S.I.-No.-6-of-2018-European-Union-Payment-Services-Regulations-2018.pdf>*

### **Banking Sector**

83. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the progress State-supported banks have made on the Markets in Financial Instruments Directive II, MiFID II; the potential implications for not implementing the directive; the potential implications for non-compliance in time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5268/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Markets in Financial Instruments Directive II came into effect at the beginning of this year.

AIB have provided me with the following comment:

“MiFID II obligations which were due for 3 January have been assessed and the relevant updates have been applied to the AIB business model. Elements that are phasing in post this date are in development and are currently on track for delivery.”

PTSB have provided me with the following comment:

“Permanent TSB has addressed the requirements of the Markets in Financial Instruments relating to its business.”

The European Union (Markets in Financial Instruments) Regulations 2017 – Part 2, Chapter 4 of Statutory Instrument 375 of 2017 – lists applicable sanctions. The Statutory Instrument can be found at the following link:

*<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2017/si/375/made/en/pdf>*

### **Mortgage Data**

84. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the value of warehoused

debt for the 27,376 PDH split mortgages; the value of warehoused debt for the 2,048 BTL split mortgages; the amount of the warehoused debt owned by each of the State-supported banks; the plan or strategy in place to deal with outstanding warehoused debt; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5269/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Central Bank has provided me with the following information in relation to the warehousing of a portion of debt associated with split mortgages.

“The Central Bank publishes Mortgage Arrears Data detailing quarterly developments in the number and value of mortgages in arrears, restructured mortgages, repossessed properties, for principal residences and buy-to-let properties. The reporting population includes credit institutions, non-credit institutions and non-resident mortgage providers.

The corresponding values of the sum of permanent and temporary split mortgages, as restructure types is €2.7 billion for PDH, and €273 million for BTL.

The Central Bank of Ireland is providing input into the ECB’s review of warehoused debt but this process has yet to be completed. The output from this process will be communicated to the relevant institutions through the regular supervisory channels.”

In response to the Deputy’s question, AIB have advised me of the following:

“The value of warehouse debt for split mortgages is not disclosed in the Bank’s Annual Financial Accounts.

AIB supports co-operating customers and provides sustainable solutions based on customers affordability. The warehouse/secondary facility facilitates the provision of a restructured solution which is aligned to the customers affordability. Repayment is dependent on the customers performance on the restructured loan and is reviewed on a case by case basis.”

In response to the Deputy’s question, PTSB have advised me of the following:

“Permanent TSB has approximately 6,500 active split mortgage loans. There are 6,137 Home Loans with warehouse balances of €593m and 388 Buy-to-Let Loans with warehouse balances of €44m.

Permanent TSB’s approach to this warehouse debt is in accordance with CCMA and its agreement with these customers to engage with them on a regular review cycle such that as the customer’s circumstances improve, the debt is transferred from the warehouse to the live mortgage in order that the loan is repaid at end of the mortgage term.”

### **Tax Appeals Commission**

85. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of tax appeals before the Tax Appeals Commission; the value of tax these disputes amount to; the appeals by ranges (details supplied) respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5270/18]

86. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the age and value of tax appeals before the Tax Appeals Commission by ranges (details supplied) respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5271/18]

87. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of new appeals

brought before the Tax Appeals Commission in each month since January 2016; the number of cases concluded in each month since January 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5272/18]

88. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of appeals before the Tax Appeals Commission that have been concluded since January 2016 that have been settled; the value of the settled; the number that have been withdrawn; the value these amounted to; the number of cases that have been heard; the value these appeals amounted to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5273/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 85 to 88, inclusive, together.

The TAC was established and new procedures for making, processing, adjudicating and determining appeals came into effect on 21st March 2016. Before this date taxpayers sent their appeals directly to Revenue who then transferred cases to the Appeal Commissioners when they were ready for a hearing. Since that date, taxpayers send their appeals directly to the TAC which then notifies Revenue of the appeals. The TAC has full control over the processing and hearing of appeals.

I am advised by the TAC that the number of appeals before it can change frequently, depending on a number of factors, including the number of additional appeals received each day; the numbers closed each day; how many appeals are part-settled and how many that will settle based on the outcome of a “leader-case”. The Commission can also be informed, by an appellant(s) or the Revenue Commissioners, that an appeal has settled or been withdrawn which might indicate a reduction in the number of appeals on hand; however, until this is confirmed by both parties, the TAC cannot deem the matter closed.

I am further advised by the TAC that it is not possible, for the most part, to provide the age of tax appeals before it, as many of them were transmitted to the Commission, in large tranches during 2016 by the Office of the Revenue Commissioners. In relation to those ‘legacy’ appeals, some were submitted by the appellant in 2016, to Revenue, but many had been with Revenue for some time before that. Therefore, it is only possible to advise of when the TAC received appeals in 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Following its establishment in 2016, I am informed that approximately 3,322 appeals transferred to the TAC, at various stages during 2016, from both the Office of the Revenue Commissioners and the Office of the Appeal Commissioners. The TAC has further advised me that, as of 30 January, it currently has approximately 3,648 appeals under its remit.

The TAC has informed me that this figure comprises of the following active appeals:

Appeals received 2016: 499

Appeals received 2017: 1,475

Appeals received 2018: 251

Legacy Appeals: 968

Pre Establishment: 305

Cases Stated: 150

The tables below have been provided by the TAC which reflect all new appeals received and those closed in 2016, other than legacy appeals and pre-establishment appeals relating to

years prior to 2016. I have also been informed that a further 400 appeals which were received in 2016 have been closed since then, leaving a remaining total of 499 appeals.

As per table 2 below, the TAC received 1,743 new appeals in 2017. The table reflects all new Appeals received and those closed in 2017. Of these, I am advised that a further 16 have been closed in 2018, leaving a total of 1,475 appeals dating from 2017.

**Table 1 - New Appeals Per Month 2016**

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Appeals Received	30	40	40	83	74	90	113	71	81	78	94	105	899
Appeals Closed	5	8	3	9	14	15	24	14	14	22	40	41	209

**Table 2 - New Appeals Per Month 2017**

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Appeals Received	561	77	173	90	105	81	111	88	105	93	108	151	1,743
Appeals Closed	5	13	18	16	66	24	30	14	9	24	9	24	252

**Table 3 - New Appeals Per Month 2018**

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Appeals Received	251												251
Appeals Closed	1												1

I understand that the TAC has been working to establish a more comprehensive database of the material relevant to ongoing appeals with a view to being in a better position, in mid-2018, to report in a more useful manner. I look forward to the completion of the data compilation enhancements by the TAC which I expect will result in it being in a position to report in a timely and more comprehensive manner. The TAC will be submitting its annual report to me before 31st March 2018 which I expect will contain comprehensive statistical information in relation to appeals, hearings, adjudications and determinations and which will be laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas. My Department will continue to liaise with the Commission in relation to its resource requirements.

While Revenue also maintains statistics on appeals, for various reasons these will not necessarily correspond with those provided by the TAC. For example, there may be time lags in the notification of new appeals by the TAC to Revenue and also time lags in the closure of appeals by the TAC following settlement of an appeal by agreement between Revenue and the appellant. As the TAC is now the competent body for the management of appeals, I consider that it is appropriate that it be the primary source for appeals statistics. However, there is one important

piece of information that the TAC does not currently receive for those appeals made directly to it. This is the value figure for the amount of tax that is outstanding or in dispute. I have been advised by Revenue that it would have no difficulty in providing the TAC with this information. This information could then be associated with the open appeals being managed by the TAC.

I have obtained the following information from Revenue in relation to the amount of tax in dispute with both corresponding value bands and age band.

Band (€)	Total in dispute (€)
Below 10,000	3,358,955
10,000 to 50,000	24,325,926
50,000 to 1,000,000	227,899,345
1,000,000 to 5,000,000	298,752,433
Above 5,000,000	1,054,644,264
Totals	1,608,980,923

  

Age (years)	Amount in dispute (€)
Less than 2	684,537,344
2 to 5	567,293,382
6 to 10	326,424,107
Older than 10	30,726,090
Totals	1,608,980,923

### Tax Appeals Commission

89. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the average timeframe it takes for a tax appeal in the Tax Appeals Commission from the submission of the appeal to its conclusion; the average timeframe it takes between a hearing being heard and the determination been made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5274/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Following its establishment the Tax Appeals Commission (TAC) received thousands of appeals from both the Revenue Commissioners and the Office of the Appeal Commissioners. Further to this the TAC became the first port of call for all new appeals, of which they received 899 in 2016. I am advised that due to the volume of appeals received and nature of the appeals, the information sought by the Deputy cannot be readily provided.

I understand that the TAC is increasingly conducting less formal hearings with a view to assisting all parties reach a settlement or agreement more expeditiously. These are also being used in order to facilitate the timely progression of appeals and where possible to agree the main points prior to the formal hearing.

With regard to the second part of the deputy's question, I am advised by the TAC, that since the appointment of the current Appeal Commissioners in late 2015, adjudication has commenced or been completed, either with or without a hearing, in respect of 158 appeals. Determinations have issued in respect of 82 of those appeals. On average it took 213 days between the hearing and the determination. I am further advised that of the 76 remaining cases for which a determination is outstanding, they have been waiting on average 319 days so far to date. The Deputy may be interested to note that one of the outstanding determinations relates to an appeal

case that will directly impact on approximately 350 individual appeals.

As the Deputy will appreciate these figures are averages and do not reflect the complexity of the appeals or the reasons for any possible delay. I am advised that hearings can be adjourned for a number of reasons to include the submission of further evidence, for further hearing at a later date, to await the outcome of Court proceedings etc., and of course for consideration by the Commissioner of the appeal prior to the determining of same.

### **Tax Appeals Commission**

90. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the number of full-time tax commissioners working for the Tax Appeals Commission; the number of part-time commissioners; the number of all other staff both part-time and full-time working for the commission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5275/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Since its establishment in March 2016 the Tax Appeals Commission (TAC) has had two full time Commissioners. An additional temporary Commissioner was appointed in June 2017 for a 2-year period in order to assist in disposing of the legacy appeals which transferred to the Commission from the Revenue Commissioners. Further to this, the Commission currently comprises of the following administrative staff: PO, 1; AP, 3; HEO, 1.5; EO, 3; and CO, 3.

The TAC has a recruitment campaign underway in conjunction with the Public Appointments Service to engage experienced, tax-qualified staff to assist with all appeals. This process is currently underway with applications having been received in early January 2018. It is expected to progress to the next stage in due course.

### **Tax Appeals Commission**

91. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the annual interest charged on appeals outstanding that are with the Tax Appeals Commission; if interest is paid by the Revenue Commissioners for holding money that has been determined by the Tax Appeals Commission as being wrongfully collected; if so, the annual interest rate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5276/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that while a matter is subject to an appeal to the Tax Appeals Commission, the collection of the amount of tax that is in dispute is suspended until the appeal is determined by the Tax Appeals Commission. Where the Tax Appeals Commission find in favour of Revenue, and the tax is found to be due and payable, the original due date in respect of that tax continues to apply for interest purposes. Appellants can make protective payments to Revenue in advance of the determination to minimise their potential exposure to interest charges.

Interest payable on outstanding income tax, corporation tax and capital gains tax in respect of a given period of late payment is set out in section 1080 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (TCA 1997). The current interest rate on overdue tax in respect of income tax, corporation tax, capital gains tax, gift and inheritance tax is currently 0.0219% per day which equates to an annual rate of 7.92%. The current interest rate on overdue tax in respect of taxes such as VAT and PAYE is currently 0.0274% per day, which equates to an annual rate of 10%, as set out in section 114 of the Value Added Tax Consolidation Act 2010 (VATCA 2010) and section 991 of the TCA 1997.

Where the Tax Appeals Commission finds in favour of the appellant there may be an overpayment of tax to be repaid. Section 865A of TCA 1997 states that where a repayment of direct taxes arises to a taxpayer for a chargeable period due to a mistaken assumption by Revenue in applying tax legislation, interest is payable on the amount overpaid for each day after the end of the period in question or, if later, the date on which the tax was paid, until the date on which the repayment is made. Interest is payable at the rate of 0.011% per day, which equates to an annual rate of 4.015%. Section 105 of the VATCA 2010 provides for the same rate in respect of VAT refunds as a result of a mistaken assumption by Revenue. Interest is not payable in these circumstances where the overpaid tax is offset against outstanding tax and/or returns are outstanding or where the amount of interest is less than €10.

### **Tax Collection**

92. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Finance the status of a query by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5290/18]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that the income tax owed by the person concerned for 2016 is based on a return they completed for the year in question. I am further advised by Revenue that arrangements are being made to make direct contact with the person concerned to clarify matters as regards the tax owed and to agree a suitable payment arrangement for any tax owed.

### **Public Sector Pensions Data**

93. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the arrangements to ensure that retired civil servants on pensions receive pro-rata payment restoration with serving civil servants; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4985/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I refer the Deputy to my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 186 on 23 January 2018.

### **Public Sector Staff Retirements**

94. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the timeframe for the legislation to extend the mandatory retirement age in the public sector to 70 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4986/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I refer the Deputy to my reply to Parliamentary Question No. 146 on 14 December 2017.

### **EU Funding**

95. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he has raised the issue of cross-Border funding at recent engagements with European Union representatives. [4279/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Ireland and Northern Ireland are currently partners in two EU-funded cross-border Cooperation Pro-

grammes, PEACE and INTERREG. Between them they have seen nearly €3.5 billion of investment in Northern Ireland and the Border region of Ireland over the last quarter of a century.

The Government is proud of the role it played in securing EU funding for a fourth PEACE programme. Along with its sister INTERREG Programme, it will see investment of more than half a billion Euro in Ireland and Northern Ireland over the period 2014-2020.

The programmes are important drivers of regional development in a cross-border context. Through EU-funded cooperation, a range of Departments and agencies, North and South, have engaged in and benefitted from a variety of cross-border and cross-community projects.

Support for the two programmes from the European Regional Development Fund is not only an important source of funding but also a key element of the European Union's continuing commitment to the process of peace building and reconciliation in the region over the last quarter of a century.

As part of the contingency planning undertaken by the Government prior to the UK referendum on EU membership, my Department identified the risks to these EU-funded programmes in the event that the UK voted to leave.

As a result, we responded to the result of the referendum immediately, with the first official level contacts with the European Commission taking place on the day of the referendum result itself.

The Irish Government has been clear that its ambition is the successful implementation of the current programmes and successor programmes post-2020.

In the immediate aftermath of the referendum I proposed that the then Finance Minister in Northern Ireland, Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, and I would write jointly to the EU's Regional Policy Commissioner, Corina Cretu, to highlight the importance we attach to the programmes. I then raised the matter at meetings of the General Affairs Council devoted to Cohesion Policy. In the margins of last April's Council meeting in Luxembourg I had a bilateral meeting with the Commissioner about the programmes. I subsequently wrote to her to invite her to visit the region and see for herself the important work that is taking place on the ground, and she has indicated her desire to do that. In the meantime there have been ongoing contacts at official level.

I was delighted, therefore, that December's agreed progress report between the EU and the UK includes a specific paragraph which reflects the Irish Government's ambition to complete the current programmes and to examine favourably the possibilities for future programmes. In its communication that accompanied the progress report, the Commission commits itself to proposing the continuation of the programmes.

Now that the Council, the Commission and the UK have all signalled their commitment to the programmes, my officials and I are proceeding on two fronts.

As regards the current programmes, my objective is ensure the successful implementation of PEACE and INTERREG, notwithstanding the UK exit in 2019.

As regards future programmes, my objective is to ensure the continuation of the deep cross-border cooperation that is the hallmark of the current programmes with Northern Ireland. My Department is developing proposals about ways of achieving this for discussion with the Commission.

96. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department has completed an external quality assurance assessment of its internal audit function as required by the Institute of Internal Audit standards that were introduced in 2012 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5116/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Internal and EU Audit Unit of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) provides an internal audit service not only to that Department but also to the Department of Finance on a shared service basis.

As required by the Internal Audit Standards launched by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in 2012, the Internal Audit Unit function underwent an External Quality Assessment (EQA) which was carried out in November 2015 by the Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors, the standard setting body for internal audit. The objective of the EQA was to provide an independent assessment of the effectiveness of the internal audit function as applied across the two Government Departments. This included considering the team's conformance to the International Professional Practices Framework (IPPF), the globally recognised standard for quality in Internal Auditing.

The overall assessment conclusion was that the internal audit function met the highest grade rating used by the Institute of Internal Auditors i.e. "generally conforms" to the IIA's professional standards. This means that the Internal Audit team may state in its audit reports that the work "has been performed in accordance with the IPPF".

### Apprenticeship Data

97. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of persons enrolled in apprenticeships in his Department and State agencies under his remit by gender in tabular form; and if he will list each such apprenticeship. [5262/18]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The current apprenticeships in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and bodies under its aegis are listed in the following table:

OPW Apprenticeships as of 31/01/2018	Female	Male	Total
Carpenter and Joiner	1	9	10
Construction Plant Fitter		5	5
Stonecutter and Stonemason		23	23
Wood Manufacturer and Finisher		2	2
TOTAL			40

### Training Support Grant

98. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a person (details supplied) has not received the full payment for their training course; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [5015/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** I have been informed by Cavan Monaghan Education and Training Board that the National Learning Network in Monaghan has contacted the individual concerned and the matter has now been remedied.

### **Student Grant Scheme Eligibility**

99. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which the distances for SUSI adjacent and non-adjacent grants are defined. [4857/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The current qualifying distance of 45km for the higher non-adjacent rate of student grant, takes into account a reasonable radius within which students may commute on a daily basis. The measurement of the distances relating to the award of adjacent or non-adjacent rates of student grant is a matter for the relevant grant awarding authority. The distance measurement for student grant rates is governed by Article 27(3)(a) and (b) of the Student Grant Scheme 2017. This provides that the relevant distance will be measured in line with agreed guidelines. The guidelines require that the shortest most direct route between the applicant's normal residence and the institution being attended should apply. In determining the shortest most direct route, the relevant awarding authority shall establish:- the method for measuring a route; and- the factors to be taken into account in establishing and measuring a route. SUSI has progressively introduced a number of measures that are intended to make the Student Grant Scheme more efficient for students. One of these measures is the introduction of Eircode which has helped to reduce processing times for applicants.

However, the actual calculation of distance from a student's home to college has not changed from previous years, and SUSI continues to use google maps to calculate distance.

If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant, or that the rate of grant awarded is not the correct one, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to SUSI. Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal may be submitted to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board within the required timeframe. Such appeals can be made by the appellant on line via [www.studentgrantappeals.ie](http://www.studentgrantappeals.ie)

### **DEIS Eligibility**

100. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the assessment methodology for DEIS application has been revised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5088/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The approach taken to identify levels of disadvantage in schools was informed by the Review of the DEIS programme in 2016. As you are aware, the identification of levels of disadvantage in schools is based on data provided by schools themselves, combined with publicly available Small Area of Population Census data, as represented by the Pobal HP Index. The data is applied uniformly across all the schools in the country. A detailed account of the methodology adopted is available on my Department's website.

An update of the identification model is currently underway. This will take account of the most recent pupil data as provided by schools for the current academic year. This information is combined with the Pobal HP Index of Deprivation, based on CSO Small Area Population Statistics derived from the 2016 National Census. It is envisaged that this process will be completed by the end of Quarter 1 of this year.

Just to be clear schools are not required to make an application for DEIS as all schools are assessed using the new uniform identification model.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

101. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a new school building project for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4982/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy may be 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 are working 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 he refers. A number of site options were identified and assessed and a short-list of technically suitable site options was selected with the assistance of local authority officials and assessed in further detail.

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 every effort is being made to secure the suitable site for the school as expeditiously as possible.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

102. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a sports hall will be provided for a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4997/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy is aware, a building project for the school to which he refers is included in my Department's six year construction programme.

I wish to advise the Deputy that a school site visit, by my Department's technical staff, has taken place, in the context of progressing the school project concerned. Schedules of accommodation, for purposes of the school's project brief, are currently being devised and my Department will be in further contact with the school authorities when these have been finalised.

### **School Accommodation Provision**

103. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding for additional school accommodation for a school (details supplied) will be reconsidered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5001/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department received an application for the provision of additional accommodation at the school referred to in respect of both classroom and ancillary accommodation.

When assessing the application it was noted that the existing school accommodation comprises of four mainstream classrooms, two special education teaching, SET rooms, a library/computer room, staff room and a general office. With a staffing complement of four mainstream teachers and one SET teacher it was determined that, as there was no deficit of mainstream class accommodation, additional accommodation is not required at this point.

My Department has written to the school authority to convey the position.

It is open to the school authority to submit additional information that may not have been provided with the original application e.g. confirmation of the appointment of an additional mainstream teacher. Any additional information submitted will be considered by my Department and a response will be conveyed directly to the school.

### **DEIS Applications**

104. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a DEIS application by a school (details supplied) in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5003/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** We have, for the first time, introduced an objective, statistics based model for deciding which schools merit inclusion in the DEIS programme, so that all stakeholders can have confidence that we are targeting extra resources at those schools with the highest concentrated levels of disadvantage.

The key data sources used in the DEIS identification process are the DES primary online database, POD, and post-primary online database, PPOD, and CSO data from the National Census of Population as represented in the Pobal HP index for small areas which is a method of measuring the relative affluence or disadvantage of a particular geographical area. Variables used in the compilation of the HP index include those related to demographic growth, dependency ratios, education levels, single parent rate, overcrowding, social class, occupation and unemployment rates. This data is combined with pupil data, anonymised and aggregated to small area, to provide information on the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in the pupil cohort of individual schools.

A detailed document explaining the methodology used in the Identification process is available on the Department's website at

*[www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Identification-Process.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Identification-Process.pdf)*

Just to be clear, schools are not required to make an application for DEIS as all schools are assessed using the new uniform identification model.

It is important to note that schools included in DEIS with effect from September 2017 are those whose level of disadvantage has been identified as those schools serving the highest con-

centrations of disadvantage among their pupil cohort. Schools which have not been included at this stage are those which have not been identified as having the highest levels of concentrated disadvantage amongst their pupil cohort, under the new identification model.

It is also important to note that this is the first step in a process and the fact that a school has not been included now does not preclude its inclusion at a later date, should the assessment indicate a level of disadvantage that warrants additional supports.

An update of the identification model is currently underway. This will take account of updated school data as provided by schools for the current school year combined with the Pobal HP index of deprivation, based on small area population statistics derived from the 2016 National Census. It is envisaged that this process will be completed by the end of March this year.

Should this exercise reveal that any school, which did not qualify for DEIS in 2017, meets the criteria applicable to schools with the highest concentration of disadvantage based on the updated information then additional schools may be included subject to available resources.

### **Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration**

105. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a higher pay scale to LTI co-ordinators will be set (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5007/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** I am not aware of any plan to introduce a higher payscale to LTI co-ordinators.

On 21 March 2002, the Labour Court recommended that LTI community training supervisors should receive an increase in pay and that the total grant paid by FÁS to project sponsors for supervisor pay should be increased by 20%. Sponsors were to be advised that the total increased grant, less employers PRSI, should be paid to supervisors. This was implemented by FÁS.

The recommendation also stated that for future pay increases, the supervisors should have a pay relationship with and be 'linked proportionally' to community training centre (CTC) managers. Any benefit to the claimants arising from the pay relationship should be paid in accordance with the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, which was in place at the time. Since then, LTI community training supervisors have received increases under national agreements, in line with CTC managers.

### **Remote Area Boarding Grant**

106. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an application by a person (details supplied) for a remote area boarding grant will be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5014/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The purpose of the remote area boarding grant scheme is to give students who are disadvantaged because of their remoteness from schools an opportunity to attend school on the same basis as students not so disadvantaged.

The terms of this scheme are set out in Circular 16/2016 which is published on my Department's website at

[www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0016\\_2016.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0016_2016.pdf).

The grant is paid to students whose normal place of residence is outside the range of public transport services to a school providing free second-level education.

Under the terms of the scheme, a suitable second level school is a school which is recognised by the Department for the purpose of providing the prescribed certificate course which enters its students for the State examinations and is subject to inspection by my Department. The curriculum choices provided by a school within 25 km of the applicant's normal place of residence is not a factor in the determination of eligibility for the award of a grant.

The application referred to by the Deputy does not meet the qualifying criteria as the student resides less than 25km from Gaelcholaiste Chiarrai, the nearest all-Irish medium second level school.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

107. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the action he will take to ensure work is resumed at a club (details supplied) in Dublin 7 following the financial collapse of a company. [5020/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The works at the club to which the Deputy refers is part of a larger school building project which is nearing completion. The employers representative who leads the design team has informed my Department that a sub-contractors personnel who were involved in works on the all-weather pitch left the site last Thursday and have not yet returned.

My Department has instructed the employers representative to engage with the main contractor delivering the project to ensure that the remaining works at the club are completed as quickly as possible.

The company which the Deputy names in the details supplied is not involved in this school building project.

### **Defibrillators in Schools Provision**

108. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if funding will be made available to provide defibrillators in each school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5025/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The position is that under the provisions of the Education Act 1998, the board of management is the body charged with the direct governance of a school.

My Department currently has no plans to provide funding to schools to install defibrillators. The decision to install a defibrillator is made at local school level and is a matter for the board of management of each individual school.

I understand that a national steering group on out of hospital cardiac arrest was established in 2017 and is representative of health professionals, patient groups, healthcare providers and other sectors. It aims to strengthen the chain of survival for cardiac arrest. The report from the group, due in 2018, will provide advice to the HSE and the Department of Health on the most

effective ways of improving survival for cardiac arrest including training for cardiopulmonary resuscitation, building on the community first responder programme and making public access defibrillators more easily accessible in community settings and in schools.

### **Remote Area Boarding Grant**

109. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a grant application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5029/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The purpose of the remote area boarding grant scheme is to give students who are disadvantaged because of their remoteness from schools an opportunity to attend school on the same basis as students not so disadvantaged.

The terms of this scheme are set out in Circular 16/2016 which is published on my Department's website at

*[www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0016\\_2016.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0016_2016.pdf)*

The grant is paid to students whose normal place of residence is outside the range of public transport services to a school providing free second-level education.

Under the terms of the scheme, a suitable second level school is a school which is recognised by the Department for the purpose of providing the prescribed certificate course which enters its students for the State examinations and is subject to inspection by my Department. The curriculum choices provided by a school within 25 km of the applicant's normal place of residence is not a factor in the determination of eligibility for the award of a grant.

The application referred to by the Deputy does not meet the qualifying criteria as the student resides less than 25km from Colaiste Ghobnatan, the nearest all-Irish medium second level school.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

110. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a building project at a school (details supplied); and if the matter will be expedited. [5076/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department approved funding to the school in question to provide accommodation for pupils with special educational needs.

The school has since written to my Department seeking significant further funding for additional works. The school's correspondence will be considered and a decision will be conveyed to the school authority subsequently.

### **Internal Audits**

111. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has completed an external quality assurance assessment of its internal audit function as required by the Institute of Internal Audit standards that were introduced in 2012 (details sup-

plied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5109/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I can confirm for the Deputy that, following a procurement process using an Office of Government Procurement (OGP) framework agreement, a contract was signed with external consultants in December 2017 for the process in question. The external quality assurance assessment of my Department's internal audit function is currently underway.

### **Teacher Recruitment**

112. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the degree to which he expects to be in a position to address the issue of the shortage of teachers at all levels throughout the country; if the situation is more severe in urban or rural areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5190/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Additional investment has allowed the successful recruitment of over 5,000 additional teachers in the last two years. Since 2012/2013 there are 8,900 more teachers in our schools. No other part of the public service has seen this sort of growth, which is testament to the Government's commitment to education and its importance in fulfilling our national ambitions.

The numbers of graduates from initial teacher education programmes have also remained broadly constant. Over 8,000 primary and 7,800 second level teachers have graduated in the last five years and in 2018 it is estimated that approximately 1,870 primary and 1,523 post primary teachers will graduate.

However, I fully acknowledge the concerns that have been expressed about teacher supply.

Last Friday I announced the suspension of restrictions on substitution limits for teacher on career break. Schools have also been reminded that, in considering career break applications, the needs of pupils should take precedence and they must take account of the availability of appropriate qualified replacement teachers.

At post primary level, we are examining the operation of the PME and considering the introduction of subject quotas, targeted at areas of shortage. We are also considering the introduction of "top up" or conversion courses to upskill teachers. I have also stated that I want to double the number of second level teachers training at undergraduate level.

I will shortly be announcing the establishment of a Teacher Supply Steering Group to implement a strategy for teacher supply. As part of its remit, the group will consult with key stakeholders.

In 2018 I will also ask the Teaching Council to review subject criteria and processes for assessing overseas qualifications and to engage more with graduate fairs and final year students.

There is no evidence available to suggest that substitution issues are impacting more on urban or rural areas. The 5,000 teacher successfully recruited in the last two years have been both in rural and urban schools.

### **Schools Building Projects**

113. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to

which he remains satisfied that the school building programme here will not be detrimentally affected by the collapse of a group (details supplied) in the United Kingdom in respect of which the works here are subcontracted to Irish builders; if clear lines are being identified to protect the builders and consequently the schools already under construction for his Department; if the completion date for the schools in question remain as indicated; if schools already completed and awaiting hand-over to his Department can have the processes prior to payment expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5191/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In respect of the Schools Bundle 5 PPP programme, a contract exists between my Department and the Principal contractor, Inspiredspaces. Inspiredspaces is the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) responsible for the design, construction, finance, operation and maintenance of the school buildings.

The company referred to by the Deputy has been a 50% shareholder in the SPV. The other shareholder in the SPV is the Dutch Infrastructure Fund (DIF).

The Principal contractor for the SB5 programme continues to be Inspiredspaces. Sub-contractors on the project are employed by Inspiredspaces in that respect or indirectly by Inspiredspaces through other sub-contractors. It is a matter for all sub-contractors to agree terms and conditions and a schedule of payments with their direct employer.

DIF is currently developing a rectification plan to ensure completion of the school buildings in as timely a manner as possible. The outcome of this process will provide greater clarity for all involved in the individual projects.

DIF has confirmed that resolution of the situation is its top priority.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

114. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the state of development in each case with particular reference to commencing and or completion dates in respect of the school building programme at primary and second level in Maynooth, County Kildare and respect of upgrading of existing and or provision of new facilities at existing or green field sites, if particular issues arise that may affect the projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5192/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that under the 6-Year Construction Programme, major capital projects will be delivered at the Maynooth Education Campus, Maynooth Educate Together National School (ETNS) and Maynooth Boys' National School.

Maynooth Education Campus : a building project to construct two post-primary schools catering for 1,000 pupils each, together with a stand-alone sports hall which will be shared by both schools went on site in May 2017.

The project has a 24 month construction duration and is scheduled to be completed in May 2019.

Maynooth ETNS: a building project to construct an 8 classroom primary school with Special Needs Unit is currently at advanced architectural planning stage. It is anticipated that tenders for the project will be invited in Quarter 1, 2018.

Maynooth Boys' N.S.: a building project to construct a 24 classroom school with Special

Needs Unit, is currently at Stage 2B of the architectural planning process i.e. - Detailed Design Stage, which includes applications for all statutory consents, including Planning Permission, Disability Access Certificate and Fire Safety Certificate and also the preparation of tender documentation. Planning Permission for this project was received in August 2017.

The Stage 2B report has recently been received and reviewed by my Department. A number of issues were identified as needing clarification by the Design Team prior to approval of the Stage 2B submission.

Once a revised Stage 2B submission which addresses these issues has been received and reviewed, my Department will then revert to the school with regard to a timeframe for progression to tender stage.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

115. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the state of development in each case with particular reference to starting and or commencement dates in respect of the school building programme at primary and second level in Celbridge, County Kildare and in respect of upgrading of existing and or provision of new facilities at existing or green field sites, if particular issues arise that may affect the projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5193/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy is aware, my Department's six-year capital programme priorities building projects for demographic areas, including Celbridge, County Kildare. In this regard, major capital projects for Scoil Naomh Phadraig, Celbridge and Celbridge Community College will be progressed as part of the programme.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

116. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the state of development in each case with particular reference to starting and or commencement dates in respect of the school building programme at primary and second level in Clane, County Kildare and in respect of upgrading of existing and or provision of new facilities at existing or green field sites, if particular issues arise that may affect the projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5194/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that under the 6-Year Construction Programme, a major capital project will be delivered for Scoil Phadráig, B.N.S., Clane.

The project is currently at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2b (Detailed Design), which includes the application for statutory approvals and the preparation of tender documents. All statutory approvals have been secured.

The Stage 2b submission has been received in my Department and is currently being reviewed. On completion of the review, my Department will revert to the Board of Management regarding the next steps to be taken.

I can also confirm to the Deputy that my Department has recently received an application for major capital funding from a post-primary school in Clane. The application will be assessed and a decision will be conveyed to the school authorities when the assessment process has been

completed.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

117. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the state of development in each case with particular reference to starting and or commencement dates in respect of the school building programme at primary and second level in Naas, County Kildare and in respect of upgrading of existing and or provision of new facilities at existing or green field sites, if particular issues arise that may affect the projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5195/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that under the 6-Year Construction Programme, major capital projects will be progressed for one primary and two post primary schools in Naas, details are listed below:

St Corban's BNS: My Department has carried out a site visit to the school. The next step includes the formulation of the accommodation brief for the project and this process is in train. My Department will be liaising with the school in due course in the context of initiating the architectural planning process for the project.

Naas Community College: The building project is at stage 2B of the architectural planning process, which means that planning permission has been granted. The project has been devolved to Kildare Wicklow ETB for delivery and the ETB recently furnished the stage 2B submission to my Department for consideration. Subject to my Department's satisfaction with the submission, the project would then be ready to proceed to tender stage.

In this regard, my Department is currently reviewing our programme for capital expenditure in 2018 and 2019. The timing of the progression of the project to tender will be considered in that context.

St Mary's Girls' Post-Primary: My Department has carried out a site visit to the school. The next step includes the formulation of the accommodation brief for the project and this process is in train. My Department will be liaising with the school in due course in the context of initiating the architectural planning process for the project.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

118. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the state of development in each case with particular reference to starting and or commencement dates in respect of the school building programme at primary and second level in Sallins, County Kildare and in respect of upgrading of existing and or provision of new facilities at existing or green field sites, if particular issues arise that may affect the projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5196/18]

120. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the state of development in each case with particular reference to starting and or commencement dates in respect of the school building programme at primary and second level in Broadford, County Kildare and in respect of upgrading of existing and or provision of new facilities at existing or green field sites, if particular issues arise that may affect the projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5198/18]

121. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the state of

development in each case with particular reference to starting and or commencement dates in respect of the school building programme at primary and second level in Kilshanroe, County Kildare and in respect of upgrading of existing and or provision of new facilities at existing or green field sites, if particular issues arise that may affect the projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5199/18]

127. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the state of development in each case with particular reference to starting and or commencement dates in respect of the school building programme at primary and second level in Leixlip, County Kildare and in respect of upgrading of existing and or provision of new facilities at existing or green field sites, if particular issues arise that may affect the projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5205/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 118, 120, 121 and 127 together.

My Department's six-year capital programme priorities building projects for demographic areas, including County Kildare. The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed. In this regard, my Department has no record of receiving applications for capital funding from schools in the areas in question in the context of additional teacher appointments.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

119. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the state of development in each case with particular reference to starting and or commencement dates in respect of the school building programme at primary and second level in Kilcock, County Kildare and in respect of upgrading of existing and or provision of new facilities at existing or green field sites, if particular issues arise that may affect the projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5197/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The major building project for St. Joseph's National School in Kilcock is at an advanced stage of architectural planning Stage 2b (Detailed Design), which includes the application for statutory approvals and the preparation of tender documents. All statutory approvals have been secured.

The Stage 2b submission has been reviewed by my Department and comments have issued to the school and its Design Team. My Department requested confirmations from the Design Team that it carries out one final review of all of its tender documentation to ensure compliance with DoES requirements. The Design Team has been requested to submit written confirmation from each Design Team member including the PSDP that they have completed this review and are satisfied that the Tender Documents are complete, correct and in compliance with DoES and Building Control (Amendment) Regulations (BC(A)R) tender documentation requirements.

These confirmations have recently been received and my Department will shortly revert to the school with regard to the further progression of the project.

*Questions Nos. 120 and 121 answered with Question No. 118.*

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

122. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the state of development in each case with particular reference to starting and or commencement dates in respect of the school building programme at primary and second level in Newtown, County Kildare and in respect of upgrading of existing and or provision of new facilities at existing or green field sites, if particular issues arise that may affect the projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5200/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department has recently received an application for major capital funding from the school in question. The application will be assessed and my Department will convey a decision on the application to the school authorities when this process has been completed.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

123. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the state of development in each case with particular reference to starting and or commencement dates in respect of the school building programme at primary and second level in Tiermohan, County Kildare and in respect of upgrading of existing and or provision of new facilities at existing or green field sites, if particular issues arise that may affect the projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5201/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department has received an application for major capital funding from the school in question to construct a General Purpose Hall and to replace temporary accommodation.

Due to the competing demands on my Department's capital budget in providing essential mainstream accommodation, it is not possible to consider the school's application for a General Purpose Hall at this time.

The Deputy will be aware that over the lifetime of my Department's Capital Programme, it is my intention to replace all purchased temporary accommodation with permanent accommodation, where the need is established. To enable this development, my Department will be carrying out an assessment of the number of prefabs being used in schools to deliver the curriculum. This will also determine whether or not individual prefabs need to be replaced in the context of the long-term accommodation needs of each individual school. When completed, this assessment will quantify the number of prefabs to be replaced. The needs of the school in question will be considered as part of this process.

The position as outlined above has been explained to the school.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

124. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the state of development in each case with particular reference to starting and or commencement dates in respect of the school building programme at primary and second level in Rathcoffey, County Kildare and in respect of upgrading of existing and or provision of new facilities at existing or green field sites, if particular issues arise that may affect the projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5202/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy will be aware there is only one school in Rathcoffey, Co. Kildare.

My Department approved funding for the provision of 2 additional classrooms at the school in question together with funding towards the conversion of existing accommodation to a multi-purpose room. The conversion works funding was to be added to funding raised by the school.

An updated Stage 2a submission (detailed design) and an updated cost plan for the project was requested from the school in July 2017. This is awaited. My Department can give consideration to the advancement of the project when the required documentation has been submitted and examined.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

125. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the state of development in each case with particular reference to starting and or commencement dates in respect of the school building programme at primary and second level in Prosperous, County Kildare and in respect of upgrading of existing and or provision of new facilities at existing or green field sites, if particular issues arise that may affect the projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5203/18]

134. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a proposed new post-primary school on an existing or alternative site in respect of a school (details supplied) is likely to be progressed having particular regard to the urgent and pressing need in the area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5212/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 125 and 134 together.

As the Deputy is aware, a building project for the school to which he refers is included in the Department's 6-Year Construction Programme. In the context of progressing the building project, my Department has undertaken a site visit to the school.

The building project will be devolved to Kildare Wicklow Education Training Board (KWETB) for delivery and my Department will be engaging with KWETB shortly in this regard.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

126. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the state of development in each case with particular reference to starting and or commencement dates in respect of the school building programme at primary and second level in Straffan, County Kildare, and in respect of upgrading of existing and or provision of new facilities at existing or green field sites, if particular issues arise that may affect the projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5204/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy will be aware there is only one school in Straffan, Co. Kildare.

In March 2015, this school was approved a grant for the provision of 2 x 80m<sup>2</sup> mainstream classrooms and 1 WC for assisted users. The funding was increased in September 2015 to provide a stairs and an additional WC for assisted users. A further 2 mainstream classrooms were approved in June 2017.

As this is a devolved project, it is now a matter for the school authority to progress the

project.

*Question No. 127 answered with Question No. 118.*

### **Pupil-Teacher Ratio**

128. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the degree to which class sizes and pupil-teacher ratios continue to improve arising from the steps taken over the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5206/18]

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

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

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

It is expected that this one point improvement in the staffing schedule when implemented in September 2018 will further improve the overall ratio of teacher to students. The latest figures in relation to pupil teacher ratio show an improved ratio of teachers to students from 16:1 to 15.7:1 at primary level when comparing the 2015/16 school year to the 2016/17 school year.

The corresponding figures for Post-Primary show an improved ratio of teachers to students from 13.8:1 to 13.4:1 when comparing the 2015/16 school year to the 2016/17 school year.

The increase in teacher numbers in the current school year as a result of Budget 2017, will be reflected in the ratio of teachers to students when this information is published at the end of the school year.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

129. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which the school building programme at primary and second level in County Kildare continues to proceed as planned having particular regard to the urgent requirement of school places; the extent if slower than expected progress has been noted in respect of a particular school; the actions planned to deal with same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5207/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department's six-year capital programme priorities building projects for demographic areas, including County Kildare. The Capital Programme also provides for devolved funding for additional classrooms for schools where an immediate enrolment need has been identified or where an additional teacher has been appointed.

There are currently 29 major capital projects that are being progressed in County Kildare. This is in addition to over 12 smaller scale projects that have been approved devolved funding under my Department's additional accommodation scheme.

The Deputy will be aware that over the lifetime of my Department's Capital Programme,

it is my intention to replace all purchased temporary accommodation with permanent accommodation, where the need is established. To enable this development, my Department will be carrying out an assessment of the number of prefabs being used in schools to deliver the curriculum. This will also determine whether or not individual prefabs need to be replaced in the context of the long-term accommodation needs of each individual school. When completed, this assessment will quantify the number of prefabs to be replaced.

### **Special Educational Needs Data**

130. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which facilities for children with autism or Asperger's syndrome continue to remain available and accessible at primary and second level here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5208/18]

132. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which special needs school places are readily available at primary and second level throughout the country at appropriate locations to ensure the availability of such places within reason for children seeking the facilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5210/18]

138. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which adequate resource teachers remain available throughout all schools in north County Kildare; his plans for augmentation in specific areas of particular need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5216/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 130, 132 and 138 together.

It is the policy of my Department that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

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

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is a separate independent statutory body whose functions include planning and coordinating the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs in conjunction with schools and the Health Service Executive (HSE).

The NCSE, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for processing applications from schools for special educational needs supports as required. This includes the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools and the establishment of special class and special school placements in various geographical areas where there is an identified need.

The NCSE is aware of emerging need from year to year, and where special provision is required it is planned and established to meet that need.

DES Circular 0013/2017 for primary schools and 0014/2017 for post primary schools set out the details of the new model for allocating special education teachers to schools.

The revised allocation process replaces the generalised allocation process at primary and

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

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

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

The provision of a profiled allocation is designed to give a fairer allocation for each school which recognises that all schools need an allocation for special needs support, but which provides a graduated allocation which takes into account the actual level of need in each school.

Under the new allocation model schools are frontloaded with resources, based on each school's profile, to provide supports immediately to those pupils who need it without delay. This reduces the administrative burden on schools as schools no longer have to complete an application process annually and apply for newly enrolled pupils who require resource hours. Children who need support can have that support provided immediately rather than having to wait for a diagnosis.

Schools therefore no longer have to make applications, for newly enrolled pupils for whom resource teaching hours may have been provided under the old model, or for pupils who have received a new diagnosis, as schools now receive a single allocation for all of their special education teaching needs, based on their school size and profile.

The number of special education teachers allocated to mainstream schools has increased by 13% in the last two years, with 13,400 posts available for allocation in the current school year, compared to just over 11,800 posts allocated in the 2015/16 school year.

Since 2011 the NCSE has increased the number of special classes by over 100% from 548 in 2011 to over 1,300 with 169 new special classes for the 2017/18 school year. 1,042 of the 1,300 special classes are ASD special classes of which 149 are newly established for this school year.

125 special schools also provide specialist education for those students with complex special educational needs, including students diagnosed with ASD. The number of students attending special schools has increased by 150 on average each year over the last 4-5 years, increasing from 6,848 in 2011/12 to 7,750 in 2016/17, an increase of 13%.

In the region of 34,000 students with special educational needs will have access to 14,120 SNA posts to the end of this school year, which is an increase of 33.5% over 2011, when 10,575 SNA posts were allocated. Budget 2018 has provided for an additional 960 SNA posts for September 2018, which will bring the total number of SNA posts available to over 15,000.

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

Parents/guardians of children with special needs who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement should contact their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) as soon as possible for information on available places. The local SENO contact details are available on [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) policy advice on Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2016) found that Students are generally well supported in schools with appropriate curriculum; extensive teacher and SNA supports; improving range of educational placements supported by improved accommodation and equipment; improved teacher knowledge and understanding and a generally good standard of provision at primary and post primary levels.

The NCSE policy advice noted that ASD is a spectrum condition, so some students with ASD may require little support in school and are relatively independent in their learning, while others require significant levels of support.

The NCSE Policy Advice also states that International Research findings suggest that most students with ASD should be considered for inclusion in mainstream education with their peers, where inclusion is well-planned and well-resourced.

Decisions about placement should be based on individual needs and take into account a number of factors including parental wishes, availability of evidence-based treatments and well-trained staff and individual factors such as targets for intervention and management of behaviours.

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

Others may have such complex needs that they are best placed in a special school.

There is therefore not one preferred educational environment for children with ASD, rather there is a model which takes into account the assessed educational needs of individual pupils.

The work of the Implementation Group for the policy advice, with representatives of the NCSE, NEPS, the Inspectorate and external representatives is ongoing, in ensuring that the Report's recommendations are fully and appropriately considered.

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

131. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which adequate school places exist or are being provided for children with autism or other special needs at primary and second levels throughout County Kildare in line with requirements as set out by school authorities and parents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5209/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Ensuring that children with special educational needs are supported and given the opportunity to reach their full potential is a key priority for this government. To this end my Department has allocated SNA support to over 12,000 extra pupils since 2011 and provided extra resource teachers to meet the expansion in children in need of teaching support.

Since 2011, the increase in SNAs has been 3,545, including an additional 2,080 posts in the last two years bringing the current number to some 13,990.

The number of resource teachers has increased by 3,660 since 2011, including 1,600 additional posts in the past two years bringing the current number to 13,400.

The number of special classes has risen by 712 since 2011, including 277 new classes in the past two years bringing the current number to over 1,300.

In 2018, almost €1.8 billion will be invested in Special Education. This represents an increase of almost 43% since 2011 and amounts to almost 20% of the Department's overall Budget.

My Department's policy aims to ensure that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with Autism, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

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

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

Other children may have such complex needs that the recommendation in their professional reports state that they are best placed in a special school.

The NCSE is aware of emerging need in County Kildare from year to year, and where special provision is required it is planned and established to meet that need.

There are currently 70 special classes in the County, including 62 ASD special classes. A further 282 students, including students with ASD, are placed in 4 special schools in Kildare.

The NCSE continues to progress the planning process to ensure that all students in with Special Educational Need in Kildare can access school placements appropriate to their needs for the 2018/19 school year and beyond.

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

In this regard, Special Needs Units (SNUs) are currently under construction at 2 post primary schools in Kildare South including St Conleth's Vocational School, Newbridge and Ard Scoil na Trionoide, Athy. The SNU in St Conleth's is expected to be completed and ready for occupation by September 2018 at the latest.

Major building projects for a number of Post Primary schools in Kildare are included on the Department's 6 Year Construction Plan, and Special Needs units (SNUs) will be included in these Developments. The schools in question are:

- St Paul's Secondary School, Monasterevin
- Naas Community College, Naas
- Cross and Passion College, Kilcullen
- Athy Community College
- St Farnan's Post Primary, Prosperous
- Patrician Post-Primary, Newbridge

The projects, when completed, will represent a total investment in excess of €100 million.

*Question No. 132 answered with Question No. 130.*

### **Gaelcholáistí Issues**

133. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position in regard to the provision of a gaelcholáiste in north County Kildare; the extent to which plans are proceeding as expected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5211/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Maynooth Community College opened in 2014 with an Irish-medium Aonad and it was stated that should the Aonad demonstrate sufficient viability after four years from its date of establishment, a Gaelcholáiste would be established, in a partnership patronage model between Kildare and Wicklow ETB and An Foras Pátrúnachta.

As part of the Major School Building Projects announcement in November 2015 and in view of the continued support for an independent Gaelcholáiste, it was confirmed that a Gaelcholáiste to serve the North Kildare area will open in 2019, subject to the continued viability of the Irish-medium Aonad at Maynooth Community College.

Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board is continuing to examine the options for accommodation for the school referred to by the Deputy which will involve consideration of the timing and availability of appropriate infrastructure in the area.

My Department will continue to work closely with Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board and An Foras Pátrúnachta in relation to the provision of appropriate accommodation for the establishment of the school.

*Question No. 134 answered with Question No. 125.*

### **Education Policy**

135. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he remains confident that Ireland's education system at pre-school, primary, second, third and fourth levels remain poised to ensure an educational system on par with the best internationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5213/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In September 2016, I launched the first Action Plan for Education (2016-2019), which sets out our ambition to make the Irish education and training service the best in Europe by 2026.

The Action Planning process recognises that there is no big bang solution and that our success will be achieved by the implementation of hundreds of actions across the sector in its entirety.

I noted at the time that the publication of the Action Plan 2016-2019 was the beginning of an annual process. More detailed actions, with quarterly delivery dates, are identified in updated annual plans. These Plans are based on the original five high-level goals:

1. Improve the learning experience and the success of learners
2. Improve the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage or learners with spe-

cial educational needs

3. Help those delivering education services to continually improve
4. Build stronger bridges between education and the wider community
5. Improve national planning and support services

Progress is monitored through the publication of End of Year Review reports and quarterly progress reports. All of these are available on the Department's website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) and show the extent to which we are delivering what we said we would. They also help to ensure that attention is focused on areas where progress has not been as expected, in order to drive further change.

Next week, I will be launching the Action Plan for 2018, which has over 300 actions and subactions for delivery during the year. They are all aimed at furthering progress towards our overall ambition of being the best in Europe by 2026.

Some of the key themes that we will be focussing on this year are:

- Continuing our programme of curricular reform and developing critical skills to build momentum behind our ambitions
- Increasing the use of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment to help our young people develop 21st century skills
- Accelerating the good progress made to date in opening up opportunities for learners at risk of disadvantage.
- Continuing with steadily increasing the inclusion of children in the education system.
- Improving teacher education, leadership, quality and promoting excellence in education settings
- Rapidly expanding the programmes which respond to changing skill needs of enterprise and creating a greater diversity of opportunity in learning beyond school.
- Undertaking several measures to grow a vibrant research community
- Increasing our infrastructural capacity in order to meet demographic and other demands

A range of indicators are also included in the Plan. These are based on national and international benchmarks, and will enhance our monitoring arrangements.

In addition, I will also be publishing the 2017 End of Year Review. This shows the progress we made during 2017, with 86% of scheduled actions delivered.

Cumulatively, the Action Plans and monitoring process will ensure we achieve the ambition of the Action Plan.

## Education Funding

136. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the degree to which he remains confident that investment in education and the sciences at all levels will continue to be available in the future and having particular regard to the need for excellence in the face of growing competition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5214/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I am committed to securing continuing investment in education and training in order to deliver on the actions set out in the Action Plan for Education and to meet our ambition of making the Irish education and training service the best in Europe by 2026.

During my time as Minister, the Government has allocated over €1 billion additional funding to education and training over the past two Budgets. The gross 2018 budget allocation for the Department of Education and Skills is €10.085 billion, the largest in the Department's history.

Budget 2018 alone provided for over 2,300 additional teaching and Special Needs Assistant posts in schools by the end of 2018. It allowed for significant additional investment of over €64 million to be made in higher and further education and training from the National Training Fund and the Exchequer. It also provided funding for a range of policy areas, including a new STEM policy and curricular reform including in the areas of Agricultural Science, Applied Maths, Computer Science and Science.

The capital allocation for my Department for 2018 will be €745 million, which is an increase of over €50m on the 2017 capital allocation. This will facilitate next year the continued delivery of an ambitious school building programme, to ensure that sufficient places are available for our school going population, and the continued roll-out of the investment programme to upgrade ICT infrastructure in all schools. Additional capital funding of €663m for the period 2018-2021, allocated under the Mid-Term Review of the Capital Plan, will further boost investment in our schools infrastructure, facilitate new programmes of higher education investment - orienting the sector to cater for demographic growth and to meet key skills needs – and ensure the necessary capital investment to support apprenticeship growth targets.

In addition, last October, together with Minister Mitchell O'Connor, I announced €200m in investment in new buildings for institutes for technology, with a strong focus on STEM, including ICT, engineering and life sciences as part of the latest Public Private Partnership Programme.

### **School Accommodation Provision**

137. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the degree to which he expects to be in a position to replace unfit classroom accommodation at primary and second level here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5215/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I wish to advise the Deputy that over the lifetime of my Department's Capital Programme, it is my intention to replace all purchased temporary accommodation with permanent accommodation, where the need is established. To enable this development, my Department will be carrying out an assessment of the number of prefabs being used in schools to deliver the curriculum. This will also determine whether or not individual prefabs need to be replaced in the context of the long-term accommodation needs of each individual school. When completed, this assessment will quantify the number of prefabs to be replaced.

*Question No. 138 answered with Question No. 130.*

139. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the level of assessment and support for children and adolescents suffering from mental stress at various schools here and in County Kildare, specifically having regard to local evaluation of the need; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5217/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department is strongly supportive of the promotion of positive mental health awareness in schools. The Department adopts a holistic and integrated approach to supporting the work of schools in promoting positive mental health and to supporting those with the broad range of problems, behavioural, emotional and social.

The processes span the curriculum in schools, whole-school ethos, quality of teaching, learning and assessment, student support and pastoral care and the provision of professional development for teachers. It also involves other supports such as educational psychological services and guidance and counselling services, and the interface with other agencies, both nationally and locally. Schools also engage in a wide range of sport and cultural co-curricular activities which provide an important opportunity for students to experience success and personal growth.

Wellbeing Guidelines for Post-Primary (2013) and Primary Schools (2015) have been developed by my Department in collaboration with the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive. The guidelines are informed by consultation with key Education and Health partners and by the findings of research. They provide practical guidance to schools on how they can promote mental health and well-being in an integrated school-wide way and they also provide evidence-based advice on how to support young people who may be at risk.

The Guidelines build on the significant work already taking place in schools, including through the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum, the whole-school guidance plan, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) continuum of support model and the HSE, Health Promoting Schools process. Information is also provided on how to access support from the SPHE Support Service and other external agencies and support services. In addition Wellbeing Guidelines have been produced for the Junior Cycle Programme introduced in September 2017. This include a focus on mental health promotion. Professional development is currently being provided for schools in anticipation of this.

A range of external resources and initiatives are available to assist schools, among others, in supporting various aspects of a positive mental health process or relating to suicide prevention and crisis intervention such as the example instanced by the Deputy in his question.

The guidelines advise that in the event of pupils presenting with mental health difficulties which are above and beyond the school's capacity and ability to support, school authorities should identify and access the referral pathways for the various primary and secondary health-care services in their particular area. My Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) is available to advise schools on the matter. Referrals should, of course, be undertaken with Parental or Guardian consent and collaboration, except in an exceptional situation where there may be child protection issues. In normal circumstances referral to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is made through the student's GP. I hope this clarifies the issue for the Deputy.

My Department liaises extensively with the Department of Health and its agencies in relation to the rationalisation and co-ordination of mental health services at national, regional and local level. This liaison has resulted in the development of operational protocols for co-operation between services and clarification of referral pathways for accessing mental health

services. Awareness building for schools in mental health and well-being is supported by the health sector through overarching initiatives such as Healthy Ireland and Health Promoting School initiative. At a more focussed level my Department in collaboration with the HSE's National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) has recently commenced a pilot programme of training in SafeTALK (suicide awareness skills) on a voluntary basis for teachers. The Learning from this pilot phase will help determine the appropriate training needs for teachers at primary and post primary level.

Within my Department's Action Plan for Education in 2016/19 mental health and well-being is afforded a justifiably high priority and is one of the key goals. The actions relating to well-being and mental health include:

- Delivery of support all schools to implement the national Wellbeing in Post Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (2013 and the Wellbeing in Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (2015)).

- Introduction of Wellbeing as a subject at Junior Cycle: Guidelines on Wellbeing in Junior Cycle have been developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to support the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015. The guidelines will be introduced to post-primary schools in September this year. The Junior Cycle team are currently planning the support that will be in place for the implementation of the well-being Curriculum.

- Increasing the capacity of NEPS: an enhanced educational psychological service to schools, through the appointment of an additional 11 educational psychologists. The focus of this additional support will be on extending the roll-out of teacher programmes to DEIS schools that build capacity to promote social and emotional competence, resilience and school connectedness in all learners.

- Enhancing Guidance Provision at post-primary level: Recent budgets saw improvements in guidance allocation to schools, with Budgets 2016 and 2017 together seeing the allocation of the equivalent of 400 guidance posts, following budget measures in 2012 which removed the ex-quota provision for guidance posts (which amounted to some 600 posts). The 400 guidance posts which have now been restored will be allocated separately and transparently once again.

As stated above the Guidelines themselves form a framework within which a broad range of existing processes and practices can be rationalised within schools and brought to bear within the context of a cogent well-being and mental health support for pupils in schools. Support to the school community in this regard is being provided from a number of sources within my Department including the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT).

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

## Health Services

140. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which comprehensive school medical examinations remain in place with a view to ensuring early diagnosis and treatment in respect of conditions detected; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5218/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department does not operate the schools medical examinations service and I am not therefore in a position to comment on the matters raised by the Deputy.

These matters are therefore appropriate to my colleague, the Minister for Health.

### **Apprenticeship Data**

141. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of persons enrolled in apprenticeships in his Department and State agencies under his remit by gender in tabular form; and the detail of each such apprenticeship. [5255/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** Civil Servants are appointed to my Department following competitions conducted by the Public Appointments Service (PAS). Candidates are required to display that they hold certain skill sets that will enable them to carry out the duties associated with the Civil Service grade structures.

There are no positions at my Department that would fall into the category of an apprentice and as such no persons are enrolled. In relation to agencies under the remit of my Department this information is not recorded centrally. Therefore, I have requested officials at my Department to collate the information and it will be forward to the Deputy in due course.

The Deputy will be interested to note that the Government will be working to expand public sector engagement with apprenticeships. This will begin with taking on apprentices in the ICT area, following the validation of two ICT apprenticeships led by the ICT industry body, Fast-track to Information Technology (FIT) in 2017. The programmes, which will involve recruitment by both private sector and public sector bodies, are expected to commence in the first half of 2018.

### **School Enrolments**

142. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the serious concerns of the local community in respect of the enrolment policy of a college (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the criteria for enrolment set out by his Department is creating serious difficulties particularly as the local community had always been of the view that local students would be given priority; if assurance will be provided in the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5280/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998.

My Department's main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking school places in the area.

Parents can choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available the pupil should be admitted. However, in schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection process may be necessary.

In this regard, a Board of Management may find it necessary to prioritise enrolment of children from particular areas or particular age groups or on the basis of some other criterion. For example, some schools give priority to applicants who have attended a particular primary school (known as a feeder school). The criteria to be applied by schools in such circumstances are a matter for the schools themselves.

This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discrim-

inatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, it may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in their school of first choice.

In relation to the school in question I can confirm that the construction of a new 1,000 pupil Post Primary School in Kingswood commenced on 28th August 2017 and that, subject to no issues arising, the school, which comes under the remit of the ETB, should take approximately 24 months to complete. Temporary accommodation was provided on site to allow the school to open in September 2016.

All new schools established since 2011 to meet demographic demand are required to enrol children from within the designated school planning area which the school was established to serve. This does not preclude schools from enrolling pupils from outside of the designated school planning area, rather it reflects the need to accommodate in the first instance the demographic for which the school was established.

### **Student Universal Support Ireland Administration**

143. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the rationale for assessing a carer's respite grant as a source of income for a carer in respect of an income assessment for a SUSI grant application in respect of their dependants; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the respite grant is paid in respect of therapeutic services and residential respite care for the person being cared for to allow the carer to take a one week break per calendar year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5283/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I understand from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection that the Respite Care Grant name was changed in 2016 to the Carers Support Grant to better reflect how the grant is used by carers. Carers can now use the grant in whatever way they wish, it may be used to pay for respite care or other services, but it is not a requirement to do so.

Under the terms of the student grant scheme, the Carers Support Grant is treated as an income disregard where it is paid to recipients of the Carers Allowance and the Domiciliary Care Allowance and is therefore not included in the calculation of reckonable income. Carers Allowance and Carers Benefit are also qualifying payments for the special rate of grant.

If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant on the grounds of his/her initial classification as an independent or dependent student, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to SUSI. Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal, outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board at [www.studentgrantappeals.ie](http://www.studentgrantappeals.ie) within the required timeframe.

### **Teacher Recruitment**

144. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the timeframe for the establishment of a steering group to examine teacher supply shortages as reported in the media (details supplied); the proposed members of this group; the terms of reference for this group; the date on which the report from this group will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5285/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As the Deputy will be aware, I intend to establish a Teacher Supply Steering Group to implement a strategy to deal with issues being faced by primary schools in hiring substitute teachers and issues at post primary level regarding reported difficulties for schools hiring in certain subject areas. As part of its remit, the Group will consult with key stakeholders. The membership and terms of reference of the Steering Group are being finalised.

### **Creative Ireland Programme**

145. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for a theatre in education organisation; his further plans to design a programme for bringing professional theatre makers into the classroom as has been done with the music generation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5289/18]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In December 2016 the Government approved a new five-year initiative entitled Clár Éire Ildánach/Creative Ireland Programme, as a legacy project arising from the Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme. The Programme is an ‘all-of-Government’ initiative to mainstream creativity in the life of the nation. The underlying proposition is that participation in cultural activity drives personal and collective creativity, with significant implications for individual and societal well-being and achievement. There are five pillars of the Creative Ireland Programme.

The Pillar 1 plan is Creative Youth – a plan to enable the creative potential of every child and young person. This plan – Creative Youth – is about securing an opportunity for our children and young people to become creative citizens. The Department of Education and Skills has a key role in implementing Pillar 1, and is working in partnership with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the Arts Council, and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

The Óige Ildánach/Creative Youth Plan was launched by An Taoiseach in early December 2017. The Creative Ireland Pillar 1 commitment is to ‘enable every child in Ireland to have practical access to tuition, experience and participation in music, drama, art and coding by 2022.’ The Creative Youth plan sets out four high level strategies to work under in the coming years:

1. Supporting collaboration between Formal and Non-Formal approaches to Creativity in Education
2. Extending the Range of Creative Activities for our Young People
3. Embedding the Creative Process
4. Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Seventeen actions have been identified for 2018/19 under the Creative Youth Plan. These actions are either the expansion of existing pilot initiatives or new programmes being piloted and encompass some of the commitments in the Arts in Education Charter. The following actions are among those included in the plan, at least part of which may be drama and theatre-based initiatives:

- Scoileanna Ildánacha/Creative Schools initiative will be implemented.

Formerly developed as ARÍS under the Arts in Education Charter, Creative Schools will be piloted in 150 schools across two academic years. As part of the programme, schools will

work with Creative Associates (a mixture of teachers and artists) to reinforce the impact of arts and creativity on student learning and development. They will work in partnership schools, clustered by region, to develop the knowledge, expertise and approaches that will embed each school's creative practice, providing a mechanism for these schools to share learning with other schools.

- A Creative Clusters scheme will be piloted.

This initiative is still being scoped out. However, it is envisaged that it will commence in September 2018 as a pilot project. This opportunity for schools to form clusters will be made available in order to generate creative cultural and artistic projects. Cluster meetings will be held in Education Centres, with each cluster consisting of a range of primary and post-primary schools. Seed funding would be provided to clusters based on the number of participating schools to allow them to progress projects. This scheme will be funded under my Departments School Excellence Fund.

- Youth Theatre

There are currently 55 youth theatres in Ireland: the target is to substantially expand this number by 2022, commencing in 2019.

- Local Creative Youth Partnerships will be established on a pilot basis.

Building on the model for Local Arts Education Partnerships contained in the Arts in Education Charter, Local Creative Youth Partnerships will be established to provide support and delivery mechanisms for optimisation of local creativity resources. As part of this, new and existing collaborative youth creativity initiatives across the country, will be able to apply for funding, based on provided guidelines, administered through the ETB network. Successful applicants will be determined by local committees which will consist of a range of representatives from Local Authorities, ETBs, and local arts and community representatives. The concept will be piloted in three ETB areas in 2018.

- A National Creativity Fund will be established.

Intended to primarily provide financial support for organisations that promote creative activities for young people that may not be eligible for other agency funding and that have capacity for significant scaling. The Fund will be established by the end of Quarter 2 in 2018.

### **Legal Services Regulation**

146. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the establishment of the Legal Services Regulatory Authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4983/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I have set out the current position in relation to the establishment of the Legal Services Regulatory Authority in my Written Reply to Questions 509 and 573 of 16 January 2018 which I will therefore reiterate on this occasion.

The setting-up of the Legal Services Regulatory Authority has been under way on a number of fronts since July 2016. At that time Parts 1 and 2 of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015 were commenced as necessary to get the new Authority appointed and underway. The Authority, which is independent in the performance of its functions under the 2015 Act, has convened

regularly since its inaugural meeting on 26 October 2016 - minutes of its meetings are available on its website [www.LSRA.ie](http://www.LSRA.ie).

During its initial year of establishment, the Legal Services Regulatory Authority has been deeply engaged in the conduct of public consultations and in the making of five reports on a series of new options for the provision of legal services under sections 118 to 120 of the Act which were also commenced. It had been obliged to complete these within strictly set deadlines running from its day of establishment on 1 October 2016. All of these reports have now been laid, as required under the 2015 Act, before the Houses of the Oireachtas while also being publicly accessible on the Authority's website.

As reflected in the 2015 Act and the relevant reports completed by the Authority, the Government continues to give policy priority to the introduction of Legal Partnerships by way of structural reform of the legal services sector. It is appreciated that this places additional working demands on the Authority which has, nonetheless, been consulting with the legal professional bodies and conducting workshops in preparation for their introduction.

Alongside its ongoing consultation and reporting commitments, the current working focus of the Authority is, I understand, very much on the managed roll-out of its remaining functions. This includes the matching development of the organisational capacities and office and staffing resources essential to effective delivery. It also includes the necessary preparatory steps for the establishment and application of the new Roll of Practising Barristers under which both Law Library and non-Law Library practicing barristers will be regulated, for the first time under legislation, by the Authority. This will also be a pre-requisite for the exercise by the Authority of its public complaints functions. A further key area under development is that of the application of the levy that is to be made on both practicing solicitors and practicing barristers under Part 7 of the 2015 Act. Funding support of €1 million has recently been provided to the Authority from the Justice Vote for 2017. This follows an advance of the same amount that was provided from my Department's 2016 Vote.

It should also be recalled that in parallel to the introduction of enhanced legal costs transparency obligations on legal practitioners under the 2015 Act, extensive legal and technical preparations are also continuing separately within the courts system to complete the transition of the Office of the Taxing-Master to that of the Legal Costs Adjudicators.

Following these steps, the key structural reforms of Part 6 of the 2015 Act relating to public complaints, professional conduct and the appointment of the Legal Practitioners' Disciplinary Tribunal dealing with both solicitors and barristers, will be commenced. It is considered that this component of the Act will underpin the entire new regulatory regime in terms of its observance and enforcement. I will, of course, continue to emphasise the importance which I attach as Minister to the objective of getting the Authority open for business on the core public complaints function as quickly as is reasonably possible while also bearing in mind the risks and complexities which must be carefully managed to bring that about.

The Regulatory Authority is actively preparing to conduct the first periodic review of the operation of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015 as required under section 6 of that Act. This must be commenced not later than eighteen months after the Authority's establishment day and its outcomes reported to each House of the Oireachtas within twelve months. Moreover, the Authority is putting the practical arrangements in place for the provision, on foot of appropriate public consultations, of the required statutory report in relation to the education and training (including ongoing training) arrangements in the State for legal practitioners, including the manner in which such education and training is provided. This report, which has to be provided to me as Minister within two years of the Authority's establishment day, will cover an array of

matters set out within section 34 of the 2015 Act and be laid before the Houses.

Work has also commenced in preparation for the submission of the Authority's first three-year Strategic Plan under section 20 of the 2015 Act. The Authority will also be submitting its first full-year Annual Report having previously submitted a report for quarter three of 2016. Work is also ongoing between the Authority and my Department on a new Corporate Governance Assurance Agreement. Arrangements are also underway to fill, with the necessary approval of each House of the Oireachtas, a casual vacancy that has arisen on the Authority due to the appointment of an existing member to the Judiciary.

The Authority is nearing completion of the necessary analysis of the staffing needs and resources required to allow it to support the ongoing roll out of its functions to a structured and achievable timetable and intends to begin additional recruiting to key posts in the near future. There has been continued direct engagement between the Authority and my Department as well as between the Authority and other key stakeholders. This work has been augmented by the recent appointment by the Authority of its first full-time Chief Executive, Dr. Brian Doherty, along with its securing of enhanced office accommodation.

Against this background of complex and competing working demands, both I and my Department will continue to work closely with the Authority to enable it to come into substantive regulatory mode at the earliest opportunity and with appropriate staffing and project management. I am also anticipating an early opportunity to engage further myself with the Authority to discuss progress in relation to these matters. At the same time, it will be appreciated that the Authority is earnestly working to progress the identification and elaboration, in conjunction with my Department, of the more specific delivery dates concerned. I expect these will be made known as soon as they have been aligned, to the satisfaction of the Authority, with its anticipated working resources as an independent regulator.

### **Legal Services Regulation**

147. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will extend the time limit for complaints from three years to five years in view of the delays affecting the establishment of the Legal Services Regulatory Authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4984/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I would like to begin my Reply by clarifying that under the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015 there will be no time limit for complaints concerning allegations of professional misconduct by a legal practitioner. The three-year time limit to which the Deputy has referred will apply only to those complaints of a more minor nature that are made about inadequate services or excessive fees at what could be described as a consumer level. This is similar to the current regime that applies under the Solicitors' Acts albeit with a five-year limitation period in relation to the more minor level consumer complaints category.

In relation to complaints made under the 2015 Act about legal practitioners, a three-year time limit applies under section 58(7) to those consumer type complaints about "inadequate services" or "excessive fees" that may be made under section 51(1) of the Act once commenced. That is to say, complaints about behaviour around these particular issues at a more minor level that would not be considered to amount to "professional misconduct" as such. The application of the three-year time period under the 2015 Act is intended to encourage the early, informal and less costly resolution of these more minor consumer level complaints between the client and lawyer concerned.

However, a clear distinction must be drawn between such consumer level complaints and those of a more serious nature relating to allegations of professional misconduct by solicitors or barristers that can be made to the Legal Services Regulatory Authority under section 51(2) of the 2015 Act once commenced. This includes, where appropriate, by referral of the matters concerned to the Complaints Committee and to the Legal Practitioners' Disciplinary Tribunal that will be established under the Act. Section 50 of the Act sets out those acts or omissions by a legal practitioner that may be considered as constituting misconduct for that purpose including the charging of fees that would be considered to be grossly excessive. There will be no time limit on the making of such complaints to the Legal Services Regulatory Authority concerning allegations of professional misconduct by a legal practitioner.

All in all, I think the application of a three year limitation period to the making of consumer level complaints, and of no limitation period to complaints relating to allegations of professional misconduct, continue to represent a reasonable balance of the weight and gravity of the matters concerned and this is set to remain the policy position. Pending the commencement of those provisions of Part 6 of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015 under which the new public complaints regime will come into operation, the current complaints framework under the Solicitors' Acts will continue to be available to the public. Any complaints made about solicitors through the Law Society under the existing framework of the Solicitors' Acts will, of course, have to be completed under the existing law and procedures that apply for that purpose.

### **Departmental Operations**

148. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if legal privilege may attach to information regarding the names of persons sitting on a working group convened by a Department. [4990/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will appreciate that my Department has a very wide range of responsibilities, including matters relating to the law, courts, law enforcement and national security. In the absence of further detail on the kind of working group envisaged, the subject matter of its discussions and the composition of its membership, it is difficult to give a definitive answer to this question. In any case, to the extent that the question appears to be seeking legal advice or an interpretation of the law, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on it in response to a parliamentary question.

### **Censorship of Publications**

149. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of publications referred to the Censorship of Publications Board per annum since 2000; the number of publications prohibited per annum since 2000, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5061/18]

150. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of members on the Censorship of Publications Board in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and the cost of the board per annum in those years. [5062/18]

151. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of members on the Censorship of Publications appeals board from 2010 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and the cost of the board per annum in those years. [5063/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Ques-

tions Nos. 149 to 151, inclusive, together.

In Ireland, as in many other countries, the right of freedom of expression is subject to certain restrictions that are justified in the public interest. These include restrictions permitting the censorship of publications under certain circumstances.

Censorship of publications is governed by legislation and administered by two statutory boards, as follows:

- the Censorship of Publications Board which was established under the Censorship of Publications Act 1929, and
- the Censorship of Publications Appeal Board which was established under the Censorship of Publications Act 1946.

Any person may make a complaint to the Censorship of Publications Board.

A prohibition order may be appealed to the Censorship of Publications Appeal Board by:

- the author, editor or publisher of the publication, or
- any five members of the Oireachtas acting jointly.

The Appeal Board may affirm, revoke or vary a prohibition. Complaints and appeals must be made in accordance with the Censorship of Publications Regulations 1980.

The number of publications referred to the Censorship of Publications Board per annum since 2000 and the number of such publications prohibited per annum is set out below.

Year	Publications Referred	Publications Prohibited	Periodical Publications Referred	Periodical Publications Prohibited
2000	4	0	11	0
2001	0	0	3	0
2002	0	0	0	0
2003	1	0	15	9
2004	0	0	2	0
2005	0	0	0	0
2006	1	0	2	0
2007	0	0	0	0
2008	0	0	0	0
2009	0	0	0	0
2010	0	0	0	0
2011	0	0	0	0
2012	0	0	0	0
2013	1	0	0	0
2014	2	0	1	0
2015	1	0	0	0
2016	1	1	0	0
2017	0	0	0	0
2018 (to end of January)	0	0	0	0

The Censorship of Publications Board comprises five Board members: a Chairperson and four Ordinary Members. The Board expired in November 2011, having served a term of five years. A new Board was appointed with effect from March 2014. Members of this Board do not receive remuneration. For the years from 2011 to 2015 and from 2017 to date in 2018, no travel and subsistence allowance was paid to the Board members. In 2016, €604.35 in travel and subsistence expenses was paid to members of the Board.

The Censorship of Publications Appeal Board comprises five Board members: a Chairperson and four Ordinary Members. The Board expired in February 2012, having served a term of three years. No Board members have been appointed since that date. Members of this Board do not receive remuneration. For the years from 2010 to 2017 and to date in 2018, no travel and subsistence expenses have been paid to Board members.

### **Citizenship Status**

152. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason a person (details supplied) does not have an automatic entitlement to citizenship. [5064/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, entitlement to Irish citizenship is governed by the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. The Act provides that if either of a child's parents was, at the time of that child's birth, an Irish citizen, that child is an Irish citizen irrespective of the place of birth. In this particular case as neither parent was an Irish citizen at the time of the child's birth, the child does not have any automatic entitlement to be an Irish citizen under the Act.

Section 6A of the Act also provides that a child born in the island of Ireland on or after 1 January 2005 has an entitlement to Irish citizenship if, at the time of the birth of the child, one of his or her parents had, during the period of 4 years immediately preceding the person's birth, been resident in the island of Ireland for a period of not less than 3 years or periods the aggregate of which is not less than 3 years. Periods of unlawful residence, periods of residence which were for the sole purpose of having an application for refugee status determined or periods of residence where permission was granted for the purposes of study are excluded under the Act from the determination of periods of reckonable residence.

Where a child born in the State did not at birth have an entitlement to Irish citizenship, the parent or guardian or person who is in loco parentis to the child may lodge an application for naturalisation on behalf of the child if and when the conditions for naturalisation are satisfied, including a requirement to have 5 years residence in the State. Detailed information on citizenship and the naturalisation process, including the relevant application forms, is available on the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) website at [www.inis.gov.ie](http://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 INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

### **Legal Services Regulation**

153. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamen-

tary Question No. 495 of 16 January 2018, his plans to establish the review committee under section 62 of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5068/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am very pleased to be able to reply to Deputy Daly further to my Written Reply to her previous Question No. 495 of 16 January 2018.

The Review Committee provided for under section 62 of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015 to which the Deputy has referred is part of the new complaints process that will apply to those less serious consumer level complaints dealt with under sections 60 and 61 of that Act, respectively. That is to say, complaints about behaviour around inadequate services or excessive fees at a level that would not amount to “professional misconduct” as such. This level of complaint would be considered more amenable to early, informal resolution between the client and lawyer concerned with the facilitation of the Authority. The section 62 Review Committee allows those seeking to informally resolve complaints at this more minor level the option of having their cases reviewed. The Review Committee will, therefore, only deal with those consumer level complaints received and informally processed by the Regulatory Authority as such under Part 6 of the 2015 Act when that Part is commenced. It will be set up, at the appropriate time, by the independent Legal Services Regulatory Authority under the specific terms of section 62 of the 2015 Act. A determination by the Review Committee can be appealed by the client or the legal practitioner concerned to the High Court.

The Review Committee will not be dealing with those more serious complaints alleging professional misconduct that will be processed through the Legal Services Regulatory Authority and its Complaints Committee on a separate and more formal track. This, of course, can include referral of a case to the independent Legal Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal that will deal with allegations of professional misconduct by both barristers and solicitors and will be amenable to the High Court. Such “misconduct” will include within its scope the charging of legal fees that are deemed to be at a grossly excessive level as well as those other matters of misconduct that are set out under section 50 of the 2015 Act.

For clarity, it should also be noted that the section 62 Review Committee to which the Deputy has referred will not, when established, have any retrospective role in relation to the review of complaints that may have been made to the Law Society under the present procedures that apply under the Solicitors’ Acts. Any such complaints will have to be dealt with and completed under the existing law and procedures that apply for that purpose.

The Legal Services Regulatory Authority is now established as an independent entity on a secure legislative footing and has recently appointed its first full-time Chief Executive and secured enhanced office accommodation. The Authority’s current working focus is, I understand, very much on the managed roll-out of its remaining functions with the relevant staffing and supporting infrastructure properly in place. It is being supported in that endeavour by my Department. This will include the key structural reforms of Part 6 of the 2015 Act relating to public complaints on the respective consumer and professional misconduct levels. It will also include the appointment of the section 62 Review Committee, the Complaints Committee and the Legal Practitioners’ Disciplinary Tribunal under the terms of the Act. As I have previously conveyed to the Dáil, I will continue to emphasise the importance which I attach as Minister to the objective of getting the Authority open for business on the core public complaints function as quickly as is reasonably possible.

154. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of refugee women and children coming to County Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5074/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** I wish to inform the Deputy that under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme, refugees have been allocated to individual counties pro-rata based on the overall population of the county in order to ensure equity in terms of distribution. Under this system 90 refugees have been allocated to Monaghan County Council for resettlement. This number comprises 22 women, 46 children and 19 men. A further 3 people will be allocated in due course.

The Local Authority of the county in question has established and is chairing an inter-agency working group. All key service providers, including my Department, are represented on the working group which oversees the resettlement process. My Department has arranged to have funding provided to the Local Authority to employ, through an implementing partner, a Resettlement Support Worker for a period of 18 months and also an Intercultural Worker for a period of 12 months who will assist the families to negotiate the early months in their new community and to access local services. This funding is partly supported by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.

### **Internal Audits**

155. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if his Department has completed an external quality assurance assessment of its internal audit function as required by the Institute of Internal Auditors standards that were introduced in 2012 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5115/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I wish to advise the Deputy my Department has drafted a tender to undertake an external quality assurance assessment of its internal audit function. It is planned that this assessment will take place in 2018.

### **Garda Data**

156. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the actions that have been taken by An Garda Síochána to put in place a director of data quality as recommended by the Garda Inspectorate report, *Changing Policing in Ireland*; his views on the value of such a position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5139/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Garda Inspectorate in its report "Changing Policing in Ireland" recommended that An Garda Síochána establish a new Garda civilian staff position of Director of Data Quality responsible for data quality assurance across the organisation and specific line management of relevant Divisions.

The Government on 11 April 2017 agreed that the governance of An Garda Síochána should be strengthened through the appointment of three additional civilians to the senior management team - a Chief Information Officer, an Executive Director - Legal and Compliance and an Executive Director - Strategy and Transformation. These latter two posts have been filled.

The competition for the position of Chief Data Officer is being undertaken by the Public Appointment Service (PAS) on behalf of the Top Level Appointments Committee as is generally the case with civilian service posts at this senior level. The competition was advertised by PAS

on 17 November 2017 with a closing date for applications of 7 December 2017. I understand that the competition is currently being progressed by PAS and that it is expected that an appointment will be made shortly.

Reporting to Deputy Commissioner Strategy and Governance, the Chief Data Officer will have ownership of all organisational data and responsibility for data quality with line responsibility for the following operational areas: Data Management; Information management; Garda Information Services Centre; Garda National Vetting Bureau, Garda Síochána Analysis Service, Fixed Charge Penalty Office; Data Protection; and Freedom of Information.

Civilianisation is a key part of the Government's Five Year Reform and High-level Workforce Plan for An Garda Síochána. It has a substantial role to play in addressing critical skills gaps and capacity issues across the organisation. Already, as I have stated civilians have been appointed to newly created senior leadership posts at Executive Director level to take responsibility for the portfolios of Strategy & Transformation and Legal & Compliance. The Chief Data Officer when appointed will operate at this level. These newly created leadership posts support the major reform programme underway within An Garda Síochána and will assist in bringing diverse perspectives and management skills to the top levels in the organisation.

I have previously expressed my concerns regarding data issues within An Garda Síochána. It is imperative that data be managed and used correctly and effectively. The Chief Data Officer will bring further leadership at a senior level in relation to the management of data and I believe that this is a very positive development for An Garda Síochána.

### **Crime Data**

157. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the report on the review of possible misclassification of homicide cases will be published; if he has received a version of this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5140/18]

158. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on reports that a significant number of potential homicide cases were misclassified between 2013 and 2015; the actions he will take to ensure that past errors are rectified and not repeated in the future. [5141/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 157 and 158 together.

I can advise the Deputy that An Garda Síochána is working with the CSO to resolve an issue which emerged in relation to the classification of homicide offences. The expert oversight by the CSO of crime statistics is welcome in order to ensure that we can have confidence in the official crime statistics and can tailor our policies accordingly.

The Deputy will be aware that when a homicide occurs, the offence may be classified as murder, manslaughter or violent death. Of course in all the cases in question the crime was recorded and recorded as a homicide. My understanding is that an issue emerged due to the fact that the classification of a crime may change as investigations evolve, for example, a murder charge may ultimately lead to a manslaughter conviction in the Courts, or an assault causing harm may subsequently result in a death some time later, necessitating a reclassification to murder or manslaughter.

An Garda Síochána initiated a review of homicide classifications, initially for the period 2013-2015 but later extended the review to cover the period from 2003-2017. This is obviously

a time consuming and complex process but it is important that both An Garda Síochána and the CSO are confident that their data is robust and accurate. While the review is underway, the CSO has suspended the publication of quarterly crime statistics with the most recent figures being for Q4 2016. The review has not been published as it is not yet complete however the details will be made public on completion.

While I note that a figure of 41 deaths requiring reclassification has been mentioned in public discourse, this is incorrect. An Garda Síochána has advised that the examination of 524 cases for the period 2013-2015 identified 41 cases which required further examination and, out of those 41 cases, 12 deaths were identified which required reclassifications on PULSE - a total of 2.3% of all cases reviewed.

It is important to note that, in the review of the 41 cases, it was identified that each death was fully investigated by An Garda Síochána. An Garda Síochána has also indicated that their Family Liaison Officers were in contact with the families of the 12 deceased persons whose PULSE records required reclassification.

The Policing Authority continues to monitor this issue and ensure that there is independent scrutiny of how An Garda Síochána records data and I welcome their continued diligence in this matter. I also note the statement made by the Authority earlier today indicating that these issues will be considered again at the Authority's meeting with the Garda Commissioner, to be held in public on 22 February 2018.

In advance of this meeting, I can also advise the Deputy that I, along with officials from my Department, will be meeting with representatives from the Policing Authority and An Garda Síochána next week to discuss the progress being made on this important issue.

My Department remains in close contact with the CSO and An Garda Síochána to ensure an early return to the publication of official Crime Statistics by the CSO at the earliest possible opportunity.

### **Courts Service**

159. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of staff per district probate office and general probate office in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5142/18]

160. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the annual overall budget of each probate office in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5143/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 159 and 160 together.

The Probate Office is an office of the High Court and management of the courts is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions under the Courts Service Act 1998. Probate functions are also carried out by County Registrars at District Probate Registries in 14 provincial court offices.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that the Probate Office is funded and resourced from the overall budget allocation made to the Superior Courts Directorate which has responsibility for the administration of this Office. There is no specific budget allocation for the Probate Office and

therefore it is not possible to provide the budgetary data requested by the Deputy. The number of staff currently assigned to the Probate Office is 21.5, which includes an increase of 5.5 staff to this Office in the last 12 months to target delays in the processing of probate applications.

The Courts Service has also informed me that District Probate Registries operate as an integral part of each relevant Combined Court Office and that there is no specific budget allocation for the administration of probate services in District Probate Registries and therefore, again, it is not possible to disaggregate the specific budgetary data requested by the Deputy. All Combined Court offices provide services within the overall budget allocation provided to the Circuit and District Court Directorate, which has overall responsibility for the management and administration of that budget across all offices within the Directorate including the District probate function.

The Courts Service has also advised that the staffing of the District Probate Registries forms part of the overall staff structure within the Combined Court Office. Staff are allocated to Combined Court offices on the basis of the entire spectrum of services provided including the delivery of probate services. The allocation of staff resources within an office at any given time is a matter for the local office manager based on business priorities and demands particularly in relation to the support of the judiciary in the administration of justice. It is therefore not possible to provide data in relation to the actual number of staff assigned to probate duties in any given year.

However, as the Deputy may be aware, the Courts Service is currently undertaking a review of the delivery of probate services and this is expected to be completed early this year. As part of the information gathering exercise undertaken as part of the review, the Courts Service undertook an assessment of the number of Full Time Equivalent staff assigned to Probate duties in each of the District Probate Registries. The outcome of this assessment is provided in the table below. The County Registrar fulfils the role of District Probate Registrar and has an input into the administration of the Probate function in each office.

#### Staffing in District Probate Registries

Office	Counties served	No. of staff for probate (Full Time Equivalent)
Cavan	CavanLongford	0.4
Dundalk	LouthMonaghan	1
Mullingar	WestmeathOffaly	0.7
Clonmel	Tipperary	1
Kilkenny	KilkennyCarlowLaois	0.95
Waterford	Waterford	1
Wexford	Wexford	0.8
Cork	Cork	2.2
Kerry	Kerry	0.8
Limerick	LimerickClare	1.9
Sligo	SligoLeitrim	0.75
Galway	GalwayRoscommon	1.5
Letterkenny	Donegal	0.6
Castlebar	Mayo	1.25

161. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the request from the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission in regard to new legislation to give it independence from his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5149/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, in April 2017, the Government approved the drafting of the heads of a Bill to address a number of operational issues that had been brought to the attention of my predecessor by the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC). That work has progressed and I expect to be in a position to update my Government colleagues shortly.

Meanwhile, in May 2017, the Government established the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland (the Commission). The Commission's remit requires it to review the police oversight architecture including how complaints against members of An Garda Síochána are handled.

In parallel with the Commission's review, GSOC sent me proposals for more fundamental reform of the legislation, including in relation to its independence, in December. Given its remit, I have referred these proposals to the Commission as an input to its work and I am aware that GSOC has engaged with the Commission in its own right. The Commission is due to report in September and I look forward to receiving its proposals.

In summary, work has progressed in relation to the drafting of heads of a Bill to address some operational issues that had been raised by GSOC, while the more fundamental reform issues, including those regarding its independence, have been referred to the Commission for its consideration.

### **Departmental Bodies Reports**

162. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the recommended legislative changes in the Policing Authority's latest report in accordance with section 62O(2) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5150/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Deputy will be aware that section 62O(2) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 requires that the Policing Authority report to me, as Minister, on—

- the effectiveness of the Authority, and
- the adequacy of the functions assigned to it by the Act.

I have laid the report before each House of the Oireachtas as required by the statute.

The recommendations in the Report, including in relation to the statutory framework, are at present being considered by my officials and will, of course, feed into the wider consideration of these matters by the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland, the recommendations of which are expected to be delivered in September. In this context and at the request of the Authority, I have arranged for the Report to be forwarded to the Commission.

I welcome the Report which, in my opinion, demonstrates that the Authority has established itself as a very important and effective stakeholder in the oversight framework for An Garda Síochána.

I understand that, in addition to preparing this report, the Authority is making a separate

submission to the Commission and will continue to interact with, and assist, the Commission over the course of 2018 as required.

### **Garda Recruitment**

163. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if all the persons who sat the entrance examinations for An Garda Síochána since recruitment was re-introduced have been called for training; the number still outstanding; if an explanation has been given for the delays; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5174/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, recruitment to An Garda Síochána is governed by the Garda Síochána (Admissions and Appointments) Regulations 2013. The Public Appointments Service (PAS), on behalf of the Garda Commissioner, manages the initial recruitment stages for selection of Garda Trainees with the final stages of the recruitment process in which candidates are vetted, complete a physical competency test and a medical examination, are managed by the Commissioner and I, as Minister, have no direct involvement in the matter.

As the Deputy will also be aware a programme of accelerated recruitment to An Garda Síochána is on-going with a view to reaching 15,000 Gardaí as part of an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 by 2021. I am informed by the Commissioner that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, just under 1,600 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. Garda numbers, taking account of retirements, increased to 13,551 at the end of 2017 - an increase of over 600 since the end of 2016.

I am also pleased that funding is in place to maintain this high level of investment in the Garda workforce to ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. This year a further 800 recruits will enter the Garda College. Also 800 trainees are scheduled to attest during the year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, reach 14,000 by the end of 2018.

Since recruitment recommenced in 2014 five campaigns have been undertaken. I am informed that a total of 4,199 applicants have successfully completed the initial recruitment stages conducted by PAS and that of these 2,213 have either completed or commenced their training in the Garda College and that 814 have either withdrawn or were unsuccessful in the final stages of the process conducted by An Garda Síochána.

I am informed that An Garda Síochána is currently processing the balance of 1,172 applicants who successfully completed the PAS recruitment stages through the final stages of the process. The time frame for completing the final stages can vary due to a number factors. These include the length of the vetting process which may, for example, be more time consuming if the applicant has resided abroad; whether the applicant has to repeat the physical; or is deferred for medical reasons.

I understand that successful candidates are still being called from the 2016 competitions and it is expected that successful candidates from the 2017 competition will enter the College towards the middle of 2018.

I would advise any candidate for a position as a Garda trainee to contact the Public Appointments Service or the Garda Appointments Office if they have any queries in relation to their application.

### **Residency Permits**

164. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when an updated stamp 4 will be arranged in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5175/18]

**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.

### **Residency Permits**

165. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when a stamp 4 will be renewed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5176/18]

**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.

### **Residency Permits**

166. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when an update of stamp 4 or temporary residency will be granted in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5177/18]

**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 persons 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.

### **Residency Permits**

167. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when short or long-term residency and stamp 4 will be granted or updated in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5178/18]

**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**

168. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding the determination in respect of an application for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5179/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is ongoing.

A letter issued to the person concerned on 11 January 2018 requesting certain information. Upon receipt of the requested information the case will be further processed and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a

privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

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

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

### **Deportation Orders Re-examination**

169. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a proposal to deport can be deferred in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5185/18]

**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 is the subject of a deportation order made on 11 March 2005.

The person was deported from the State on 04 June 2006, however, according to information received from her legal representatives, she returned to this State the year after she was deported.

Representations were received on behalf of the person concerned requesting that the deportation order be revoked, pursuant to the provisions of section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). This request will be considered as soon as possible. The Deputy should be made aware that an official from INIS wrote to the person concerned on 21 December 2017 inviting her to provide further details relating to her medical condition. This has not yet been forthcoming.

The Deputy might wish to note that the decision to ensue from the consideration of this request will be to have the existing deportation order 'affirmed' or 'revoked'. Once such a decision has been made, this decision will be notified in writing. In the meantime, the deportation order remains valid and in place.

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

### **Courts Service**

170. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 96 of 24 January 2018, if he will provide a copy of the minutes or report of the meeting between the Irish delegation and the Commission in Brussels in September 2017 and the detailed submission to the European Commission in November 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5234/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I wish to inform the Deputy that any documentation, including any minutes or report of the meeting with the EU Commission and the submission referred to in the question, are confidential between the Commission and Ireland and the subject of an ongoing process with the Commission and I am not, therefore, in a position to provide such documentation to the Deputy at this point. This matter is also the subject of ongoing court proceedings.

I can, however, inform the Deputy that we pointed out firstly to the EU Commission that there are no legislative or other impediments to the exercise of obligations under the Unfair Contracts Directive in the Irish Courts and that court procedures are available for a judge to determine whether there are unfair contract terms in play. We pointed out secondly that our courts are aware of the obligations as to unfair contract terms in the context of repossession proceedings and the Unfair Terms Directive has already been applied in a number of Irish court cases and judgments which are binding on the Circuit Court where the vast majority of home repossession cases are heard. We also informed the Commission as to the extent of Government policies and legislative measures which have been put in place and are working to help people in mortgage arrears to remain in their family homes. As the Deputy will know these actions have included personal insolvency legislation, appropriate adjustments to Courts legislation to link in with personal insolvency arrangements and the introduction of the Abhaile Scheme in 2016. Abhaile has been a huge success with over 10,000 advice and assistance services provided to distressed borrowers up to mid-January 2018, a very large portion of whom are in the one to two years plus mortgage arrears category. Finally it was pointed out to the Commission that an Irish consumer mortgagor who is a party to mortgage possession proceedings has the opportunity at several stages of the proceedings to ensure that the lender's claim for possession is referred to a court to assess the unfairness of any of the contract terms.

### Apprenticeship Data

171. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons enrolled in apprenticeships in his Department and State agencies under his remit, by gender, in tabular form; and if he will list each such apprenticeship. [5261/18]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I wish to advise the Deputy the number of apprenticeships in my department and the bodies under the aegis of my department are as follows:

Legal Aid Board

Apprenticeship Type	Gender	Number
Apprentice Solicitor	Female	5

### Enterprise Support Services Expenditure

172. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the grant aid or funding available to assist a person (details supplied) to develop a business and

bring a facility to County Cavan. [5072/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Cavan, located at Cavan Innovation and Technology Centre, Dublin Road, Cavan, is your ‘first-stop shop’ for providing advice and guidance, financial assistance and ‘soft’ supports in the form of training and mentoring to anyone wishing to start or grow a business. The LEO Cavan is contactable at: 049 437 7200, or [localenterprise@cavan-coco.ie](mailto:localenterprise@cavan-coco.ie).

In the first instance, the LEO can provide a ‘signposting’ service in relation to all relevant State supports available through agencies such as Revenue, the Department of Social Protection, Education and Training Boards, Credit Review Office, and Microfinance Ireland. The LEO can also offer advice and guidance in areas such as Local Authority rates, Public Procurement and other regulations affecting business.

The LEO can offer direct grant aid to microenterprises (10 employees or fewer) in the manufacturing and internationally traded services sectors which, over time, have the potential to develop into strong export entities. Subject to certain eligibility criteria, the LEO can provide financial assistance within three main categories: Feasibility Grants (investigating the potential of a business idea); Priming Grants (to part-fund a start-up); and Business Development Grants for existing businesses that want to expand. (It should be noted that the LEO does not provide direct grant-aid to areas such as retail, personal services, local professional services, construction/local building services, as it may give rise to the displacement of existing businesses). In addition, there is a Technical Assistance Grant available for eligible micro-exporter applicants who are seeking to explore alternative markets for their product or service.

For anyone interested in starting or growing a business, the LEO may be able to offer ‘soft’ support in the form of training (e.g. a Start Your Own Business course); a mentor to work with the business proposer; or targeted programmes such as Lean for Micro (to help boost business productivity and competitiveness).

Micro-enterprises may also avail of the Trading Online Voucher Scheme (TOVS) from the LEO. The Scheme offers the opportunity for businesses to develop their website or digital marketing strategy by availing of vouchers of up to €2,500 or 50% of eligible expenditure.

Anyone with a viable business proposal can also use the LEO to make an application to Microfinance Ireland, which offers support in the form of loans of up to €25,000 to start-ups with viable business propositions that do not meet the conventional risk criteria applied by the banks. Successful applicants can avail of a more favourable interest rate from MFI if they make their application through the LEO.

I should also draw your attention to the ‘Supporting SMEs’ Online Tool, which is a cross-governmental initiative to help start-ups navigate the range of Government business supports for which they could be eligible. The tool is available at [www.supportingsmes.ie](http://www.supportingsmes.ie). By answering the eight questions in the Online Tool, a small business will, in one location, be able to:

- find out which of the over 170 Government business supports from 27 different Government Departments, Agencies and Initiatives are available to them;
- obtain information on the range of Government supports for accessing credit;
- identify their nearest Local Enterprise Office where they can discuss the outcomes of the guide further;
- download all these filtered results into a document for their further use.

## **Industrial Property Portfolio**

173. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when decisions are due to be made on the identification of suitable sites as locations for the establishment of data centres; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5078/18]

174. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if locations (details supplied) have been given further consideration as possible sites for the location of data centres; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5079/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 173 and 174 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, last year IDA Ireland appointed Jacobs Engineering, supported by AOS Planning, to identify potential strategic land banks in Ireland that would be particularly suitable for the sustainable development of large scale data centre projects.

I understand that the national site evaluation process is now well advanced and some draft information has been provided to the IDA by the consultants. On the basis of this draft information, the IDA is extending the scope of the evaluation process. The scope of this additional work is currently being finalised. IDA Ireland has indicated that a final draft report is expected towards the end of March 2018.

More broadly, the IDA continues to actively market County Cavan, and the wider border area, for foreign direct investment opportunities, including through the Agency's overseas network.

## **Internal Audits**

175. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department has completed an external quality assurance assessment of its internal audit function as required by the Institute of Internal Audit standards that were introduced in 2012 (details supplied). [5104/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** An external quality assurance assessment of the internal audit function in this Department was completed on 6 December 2016 in accordance with the requirements of the Institute of Internal Audit standards.

## **Job Creation**

176. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans and the plans of the State's industrial promotion agencies to assist in 2018 in the maintenance of existing employment and in job creation throughout County Cavan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5131/18]

177. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her plans and the plans of the State's industrial promotion agencies to assist in 2018 in the maintenance of existing employment and in job creation throughout County Monaghan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5132/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** I pro-

pose to take Questions Nos. 176 and 177 together.

The North East/North West Regional Action Plan for Jobs is a key Government response for supporting employment growth in the Border region. The Plan is stimulating job creation across the region, including Counties Cavan and Monaghan, by facilitating collaborative initiatives between the public and private sector, and through the provision of new competitive funds, awarded through Enterprise Ireland (EI) to support regional enterprise projects.

The core objective of the Action Plan is to have a further 28,000 at work in the region by 2020. We are aiming to ensure the unemployment rate is within 1% of the State average.

Sectors targeted as part of the plan include traditionally strong sectors for the region like agri-food, manufacturing/engineering and tourism. The Local Authorities, enterprise agencies, and other key public and private sector stakeholders in Counties Cavan and Monaghan have been strongly involved in, and are key drivers of the Action Plan.

The third progress report covering the period from June-December 2017 is being finalised and shows that good progress is being made. The progress reports are available on [www.regionalapj.ie](http://www.regionalapj.ie).

Some 12,000 jobs were created in the Border region since the regional Action Plans for Jobs initiative was launched in January 2015 while the unemployment rate in the region has fallen since then and now stands at 6.5% according to the CSO.

Furthermore, Live Register numbers have fallen in County Cavan by 16.1% and in County Monaghan by 15.3% in the past 12 months. There is of course always room for improvement but the latest CSO figures are testament to the Government's efforts to help create jobs and reduce unemployment.

In May 2017 Enterprise Ireland launched the Regional Enterprise Development Fund with funding of up to €60m, designed to support the ambition, goals, and implementation of the Regional Action Plans for Jobs. The first call under this Fund concluded last August, with results announced on 11th December and 21 projects were successful, totalling €30.5m in aggregate grant support. The second call will fund projects from the remaining balance of the €60m budget available, and is expected to issue in Q1 2018.

Monaghan County Enterprise Fund is one of the 21 collaborative projects that secured funding under Stream 3 which is designed to support Local & Community Enterprise Development Projects with grants of €50,000 up to €250,000 per project. The project involves the development of a Regional Food Centre of Excellence and a range of Food Product development supports.

Enterprise Ireland together with the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) play a critical role in driving and nurturing entrepreneurship all the way from an originating idea at local level, to taking-on global markets. In 2017, EI paid €2.5m to companies in Cavan and €7.2m to companies in Monaghan.

Capital allocations of €565,001 and €583,428 were made available to LEO Monaghan and LEO Cavan respectively in 2018 to fund investment in their clients by way of grants and a range of "soft" supports, such as training and mentoring. This funding is supplemented by a further €132,000 investment fund to both LEOs under the Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur (IBYE) competition – a total of 32 (Monaghan) and 31 (Cavan) applications were received by end September 2017.

Both LEO Monaghan and LEO Cavan are also in partnership with the LEOs in Donegal,

Leitrim and Sligo in a project that was awarded funding of €175,000 in 2016 under the LEO Competitive Fund. The programme – ACCELINVEST – aims at creating a clear pathway for export focused, investment-ready regional companies to progress from the LEO Network to Enterprise Ireland. LEO Cavan is also a partner in 2 other competitive fund projects with the LEOs in Leitrim, Longford and Roscommon. The LEOs concerned were awarded almost €220,000 to collaborate on a Graduate Internship for Entrepreneurship Programme in their areas and an initiative aimed at encouraging shared learning, dynamic trade development and knowledge transfer in the creative sector.

2017 was the first year of EI's strategy, Build Scale, Expand Reach 2017 – 2020. This Strategy is focused on:

- Assisting clients to create 60,000 new jobs by 2020 while sustaining the existing record level of jobs;
- Growing the annual exports of client companies by €5bn to €26bn per annum;
- Increasing the level of spend made by client companies in the Irish economy by €4bn to €27bn per annum by 2020; and
- Inspiring more Irish owned companies to have global ambition.

I am committed to work closely with Enterprise Ireland to drive this Strategy, to ensure that it continues to support companies in urban and rural areas to start, innovate, increase our exports and remain competitive in international markets, now and into the future. In recent months, with the support of my Department, EI has launched new measures to strengthen the rural and regional economy and to provide quicker access to innovation funding for exporting companies. This includes the new €60m Regional Enterprise Development Fund mentioned earlier and a new fast-track Agile Innovation Fund.

My priority, as Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, is to drive creation of high-quality and sustainable employment across Ireland, including in Cavan and Monaghan. We are making significant progress towards achieving our regional development targets, which include a 30% to 40% increase in FDI in the North East Region. There are 36 multinational companies based in this region, employing 5,007 staff.

## Trade Agreements

178. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation his views on the reports that the European Commission is to propose a yearly tariff rate quota of 90,000 tonnes of beef, 20,000 tonnes more than offered in October 2017, to South American countries in the latest round of Mercosur negotiations; and if it will be ensured that a final deal in which a beef offer is a component will not be supported. [5168/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** An EU-Mercosur Free Trade Agreement would be the EU's largest trade deal to date, four times the size of the trade agreement with Japan. It aims to eliminate trade tariffs between the EU and the Mercosur region. Irish exporters are currently subject to trade tariffs, barriers and restrictions, when exporting to Mercosur. The proposed FTA should make exports from Ireland more attractive and potentially increase demand for Irish products.

Sectoral opportunities for Ireland in further enhancing a trading relationship with this region include software and services in telecommunications, financial services, digital content and

travel, engineering products and services, life sciences, agriculture, food and beverages, and education services.

Within the region, Brazil is Ireland's main trading partner and has been identified as possessing "high growth market potential" by Enterprise Ireland.

On the other hand, Ireland has strong concerns in relation to agriculture, especially the potential impact that these negotiations present to the EU beef sector. While all FTA's include agricultural market access and TRQs (Tariff Rate Quotas), TRQs provided under such agreements are not always fully utilised by our trading partners. Equally, most Member States tend to have sensitives in relation to certain goods or services to be comprehended under an FTA.

I am keenly aware of the issues faced by the Agriculture sector and the challenges posed by a trade agreement with Mercosur. In the context of these negotiations, Ireland has many "offensive" and "defensive" interests, including in the agri-food sector and engages on these issues with the Commission, in its role as lead negotiator.

In this regard, Ireland has continued to highlight the cumulative impact of agricultural market access in relation to all EU trade agreements. My Department has done this through engagement with the Trade Policy Committee in Brussels, as well as joining with other Member States in formally writing to the Commission outlining our concerns. In addition, our concerns have been raised at political level including this Department's Ministerial team raising the issues with counterparts, both at Trade Council deliberations and bilaterally with the EU Commission.

Overall, Ireland remains fully committed to this negotiation, especially in view of the important economic and political gains expected for both sides from a comprehensive, ambitious and balanced EU-Mercosur Association Agreement. However, we believe that any TRQ offered in relation to beef must be structured - in terms of its size, staging, composition and the application of in-quota tariff rates - in a way that mitigates the potential impact of a Mercosur deal on the EU beef sector at this particular time.

The European Commission conducts the negotiations on behalf of Member States and as the Deputy notes tabled an offer of 70,000 tonnes of beef per annum last October. However, Mercosur countries are pushing for a much increased offer. I am aware of various media reports that the Commission may increase its last offer, but as discussions are ongoing, including this week, and a number of outstanding issues on a range of items remain to be resolved before talks can be concluded, my Department has not been notified by Commission Services of a revised offer on beef. Accordingly, it remains unclear what the final package will be, although it must be acknowledged that for the Mercosur countries offers on EU agricultural produce are crucial to securing any deal.

Ireland will only be in a position to take a view on the proposed Agreement when all elements are finalised, including on sensitive agricultural products such as beef and dairy, and our view will be informed in terms of the aggregate benefits the Agreement offers our economy as a whole.

### **Job Creation Data**

179. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of jobs created by local enterprise office, LEO, companies in 2017; the net number of jobs created by LEO companies in 2017; and the number of jobs in LEO companies in 2017. [5235/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Statistics in relation to the number of jobs created last year through support provided by the LEOs are currently being compiled as part of the 2017 survey of client companies.

In 2016, based on the Annual Employment Survey of LEO clients, total direct employment among the 6,846 LEO client companies stood at 34,634, of which 25,273 were full-time and 9,361 were part-time jobs, an increase of 3,679 jobs in the year.

Figures for 2017, including on an individual LEO basis, will be announced as soon as the results are available.

### **Job Creation Data**

180. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of information and communication technology workers that have been attracted to work here under the techlife portal scheme from abroad in each year since established. [5239/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Tech/Life Ireland is a government funded national initiative to brand Ireland as a top destination to pursue a career in technology. Launched in June 2016, the initiative is being delivered in partnership with Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and the tech industry. Tech/Life Ireland is a focused international marketing initiative with a dedicated website, [www.techlifeireland.com](http://www.techlifeireland.com), to attract talented and experienced tech experts to Ireland and to promote top tech career opportunities here. The initiative uses digital and social media to showcase the unrivalled lifestyle, tech environment and job opportunities available in Ireland. Initial target markets include countries in Central and Southern Europe. These have been identified based on detailed analysis of talent movement, local search activity and consultation with recruitment professionals from industry.

Over the 18 months of its operation, the website has had over 300,000 unique visitors and almost 33,000 job searches. 42% of total site traffic for 2017 was from organic sources, meaning that it did not result from paid advertisements, and the proportion of organic traffic has been rising steadily since the project began. 20% of traffic is from returning visitors, people coming back to search for jobs or find out more information about Ireland. On 10th February, Tech/Life Ireland is running an event in London, bringing together tech companies from Ireland with skilled ICT professionals from the UK and elsewhere.

As a brand-building exercise, the project continues to perform strongly. Estimating the exact number of ICT professionals who have moved to Ireland specifically because of Tech/Life Ireland, who would not have come here otherwise, is not possible to determine at this time. Such decisions are made based on many factors, and Tech/Life Ireland is just one of those. The portal, and the targeted search and social media work that goes on behind the scenes, continues to raise awareness of the top tech career opportunities available in Ireland, and to build Ireland's brand as a recognised, exciting and attractive destination for ICT professionals.

### **Insurance Costs**

181. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the timeframe to implement the recommendations in the cost of business insurance report for which her Department has lead responsibility; and if she will list each such recommendation. [5241/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The

Minister of State for Financial Services and Insurance at the Department of Finance, Mr Michael D'Arcy T.D., published the Cost of Insurance Working Group Report (CIWG) on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance on the 23rd January 2018 following approval by Government. Minister D'Arcy chairs the Working Group on the Cost of Insurance and officials from my Department along with other Departments and Agencies are members of the Group.

This Report makes 15 recommendations with 29 associated actions to be carried out. The recommendations and actions are detailed in an action plan contained in the Report with agreed timelines for implementation. My Department in conjunction with the Personal Injuries Assessment Board has lead responsibility for Recommendation 9 in the Report, which relates to a review of the operation of the six-month standstill period provided for under Section 50 of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board Act 2003, with a timeline of completion by Quarter 2 of 2019.

In parallel with the implementation of this recommendation in the CIWG Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance, my Department is implementing a number of recommendations for which it has lead responsibility from the CIWG Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance that was published in January 2017.

These recommendations include the establishment of the Personal Injuries Commission, and certain amendments to the Personal Injuries Assessment Board Act 2003. The Personal Injuries Commission, chaired by Justice Nicholas Kearns, was established in January 2017. The Commission published its first report on the 7th December 2017 and makes a number of recommendations on the adoption of a standardised and internationally recognised approach to the diagnosis, treatment and reporting of soft tissue injuries by practitioners who are appropriately competent and trained. Work is progressing on the second phase of the Commission's work, which will focus on benchmarking of Irish motor insurance personal injury awards with those in other jurisdictions.

Work is also progressing on enhancing the powers of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board. The Heads of a Bill were approved by Government and published on the 27th June 2017 and subsequently sent to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel for drafting. The Personal Injuries Assessment Board (Amendment) Bill 2018 is expected to be published in Spring / Summer 2018.

## **Brexit Issues**

182. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when the research study commissioned by her department, Sectoral Implications Arising from Brexit: Most Exposed Sectors, is due to be completed and published. [5242/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Department of Business, Enterprise, and Innovation has a number of research projects underway to help build an understanding of the possible implications of Brexit on Ireland for enterprise, consumers, and trading relations. These studies examine a range of scenarios and will provide an evidence base to inform Ireland's policy positions as part of the wider negotiation on the UK's future relationship with the EU and further mitigation measures to respond to Brexit.

One of the research projects examines the firm-level implications of the UK being outside of the European Single Market and Customs Union for Ireland's most exposed enterprise sectors. That research is now substantially complete and its findings are informing enterprise policy developments, and wider cross-government deliberations.

Given the nature and purpose of the research there are limitations on what content can be made publically available. My Department is currently preparing an aggregate summary which, while respecting firm-level confidentiality, provides insights at sectoral level. The aim is to publish the findings by end of Q2.

### **Brexit Issues**

183. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when the research study commissioned by her Department, Strategic Implications Arising from EU-UK Trading Patterns, is due to be completed and published. [5243/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** As the Deputy will be aware, the major study examining the Strategic Implications Arising for Ireland from Changing EU-UK Trading Relations will provide an evidence base on key trade and investment questions to inform Ireland's position as part of the wider negotiation on the UK's future relationship with the EU. It will also inform domestic policy responses and measures necessary to mitigate risks and maximise opportunities arising as a result of Brexit. Using a computable general equilibrium model to quantify new barriers to trade in goods and services which might emerge as a result of Brexit, the study:

- Quantifies impact of six possible Brexit scenarios on trade and investment – the impact of these scenarios on metrics such as GDP and exports is considered, and analysis of both short and long term impacts is examined; and

- Provides analysis of the likely impact of Brexit on key sectors.

The study is in the final stages of completion and my intention is to present the report to Cabinet in mid-February with a view to publishing it shortly thereafter.

### **Work Permits Data**

184. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of employment permits granted for non-EEA workers by her Department by occupation in each of the years 2014 to 2017, in tabular form. [5244/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The spreadsheet in the link provides the Deputy with the requested breakdown of the number of employment permits issued by my Department by job classification for the years 2014 - 2017.

The jobs classifications system used in the spreadsheet is organised using the Standard Occupational Classification system (SOC 2010), a system which classifies workers into occupational categories for the purpose of collecting, calculating, or disseminating data.

My Department has issued employment permits for 265 separate occupations during this timeframe.

[<a href="">debates%20authoring/webattachments.nsf/0/AD6E914E0D266F5A802582270063C822/\$File/ATT1OKFS.xlsx?openelement">Job Classifications</a>]

### **Consumer Protection**

185. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the sectors that are under investigation by the CCPC for suspected anti-competitive or cartel activity. [5248/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission is the statutory independent body responsible for the enforcement of domestic and EU competition law in the State. Section 9 (5) of the Competition and Consumer Protection Act 2014 provides that the Commission is independent in the performance of its functions, including carrying out investigations of alleged anti-competitive practices. As investigations and enforcement matters generally are part of the day-to-day operational work of the Commission, I, as Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, have no direct function in the matter.

### Apprenticeship Data

186. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of persons enrolled in apprenticeships in her Department and State agencies under her remit by gender in tabular form; and if she will list each such apprenticeship. [5250/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** There are a range of temporary secondments, internships and graduate development programmes in place across my Department and some of the Agencies under my Department's remit, however there are no persons currently enrolled in apprenticeships.

### IDA Ireland Jobs Data

187. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the target number of jobs created in 2017 in the financial services sector by IDA Ireland; the number actually created; the target number to be created in 2018; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5277/18]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** IDA Ireland's performance in 2017 resulted in the third consecutive year of strong growth under the Agency's current Strategy. Employment levels in foreign owned companies have now reached 210,443 people, with 33,000 of these employed in financial services.

I am pleased that employment in this sector is growing, with 3,400 new jobs created in financial services by IDA client companies last year. While specific investment targets for financial services in 2018 are not available, job growth in the sector forms part of the Agency's overall five year targets which are outlined in the following table.

IDA Ireland's Targets 2015-2019

	Amount
Investments	900
Gross Jobs	80,000
Net Jobs	35,000
Portfolio of Companies	1,350
Cumulative R&D spend	€3bn

## Eating Disorders

188. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 653 of 16 January 2018, the number of young children and teenagers ruled to have died in the past five years as a result of eating disorders. [5223/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** This question was sent to the Department of Health for answer on the 16th January 2018. The HSE replied directly to the Deputy advising that cause of death determination is a coronal, not a HSE function and there is no formal feedback mechanism from the coroner's courts to the HSE, Mental Health Division. The HSE does not hold this information as requested. The Coroner may be able to assist you with your request.

## National Maternity Strategy Implementation

189. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health when the national maternity strategy and national maternity standards will be implemented by the Saolta hospital group; if home birthing will be available in County Donegal by 2019; if midwife led care options in the north west will also be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5000/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The National Maternity Strategy - *Creating A Better Future Together 2016 - 2026*- aims to ensure that appropriate care pathways are in place in order that mothers, babies and families get the right care, at the right time, by the right team and in the right place. Similarly, it recognises that, while all pregnant women need a certain level of support, some will require more specialised care. Accordingly, it proposes an integrated model that delivers care at the lowest level of complexity and encompasses all the necessary safety nets in line with patient safety principles. The model consists of three care pathways - supported, assisted and specialised.

The Supported Care Pathway is intended for normal-risk mothers and babies, with midwives leading and delivering care within a multidisciplinary framework. Care will be delivered by the community midwifery team, with most antenatal and postnatal care being provided in the community and home settings. The woman can exercise a choice with her healthcare professional with regard to the birth setting, which may be in an Alongside Birth Centre in the hospital, or at home. The Strategy makes it clear that women should be offered choice regarding their preferred pathway of care, in line with their clinical needs and best practice.

The phased implementation of the Strategy will be led by the National Women & Infants Health Programme. To this end, the Programme has developed a detailed Implementation Plan which I was pleased to launch in October 2017. The Plan seeks to ensure that each Maternity Network/Hospital Group will have all three care pathways in place and operational in 2018. The Plan also provides that by early 2019, a minimum of 20% of pregnant women presenting at our maternity hospitals/units, including within the Saolta University Health Care Group, will have access to the supported care pathway.

I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly in response to your more detailed queries regarding implementation of the National Maternity Strategy and the National Standards for Safer Better Maternity Services within the Saolta University Health Care Group.

## Health Services Access

190. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if a referral to another health facility is possible for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5008/18]

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

### **Health Services Staff**

191. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the options available to a person (details supplied) who is unable to secure employment in the health sector here having previously worked outside of the State due to the requisite documentation being unattainable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5009/18]

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

### **Medical Card Eligibility**

192. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of a medical card for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5019/18]

**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.

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

193. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health his plans to make AEDs available in public areas here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5024/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Automated external defibrillators (AEDs) are devices that can correct abnormal heart rhythms in certain types of cardiac arrest. In the past number of years a number of AEDs have been installed in a wide variety of places throughout the country.

In December 2014, HIQA published a health technology assessment which found that public access to defibrillation would result in a number of patients surviving to hospital discharge. The report estimated that since 1998, more than 15,000 AED's were sold in Ireland. The report also highlighted the value of expanded cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training.

On this basis a national Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest Steering group (OHCA) was established in 2017. This group represents professional bodies, NGO's, patients, healthcare providers and other sectors. The purpose of this project is to improve survival rates for those who suffer an out of hospital cardiac arrest through the development and implementation of an out

of hospital cardiac arrest strategy up to 2020. This work will support the National Ambulance Service (NAS) and Community First Responder Ireland (CFR Ireland) in their commitment to improve clinical outcomes for Out-of-Hospital Cardiac Arrest (OHCA).

Both the NAS and CFR Ireland are working with other partners to enable a sustainable response to such events. The Department of Health and HSE are committed to improving survival rates of those who suffer an out of hospital cardiac arrest. Community First Responders offer a valuable and complementary resource to emergency ambulance provision and achieve improved survival for OHCA. Both the HSE and CFR Ireland intend to consolidate, enhance and implement further CFR schemes over the next five years. This includes increasing the availability of training in CPR in schools, work places and local groups and making Public Access Defibrillators more easily accessible with people knowing how to use them.

The OHCA Steering Group is considering how best to improve Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest survival by strengthening the ‘*Chain of Survival*’ across Ireland. National and international evidence and experience will be assessed to see if it can be applied in Ireland.

It is anticipated that the report of the OHCA Steering group, due later in 2018, will provide advice to the Department/Minister for Health and HSE on how best to strengthen the chain of survival for cardiac arrest, increasing CPR training, building on the Community First Responder Programme and making public access defibrillators more easily accessible.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

194. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health his plans to raise medical card income disregard for persons with disabilities entering the workforce; when he plans to make these changes; the amount he will increase the income disregard by; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5026/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I am committed to ensuring that the recommendation included in the The Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities Report to raise the medical card income disregard from its current level of €120 per week for people on Disability Allowance or on Partial Capacity Benefit is implemented. The Department of Health has been working with the HSE and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to progress proposals to give effect to this recommendation. Analysis has been undertaken to examine the number of people that would stand to benefit under this measure and to identify the best administrative route to implementing a change in the earnings disregard.

This work is nearing completion and it is intended to implement the recommendation in early 2018. This will be ahead of the Report’s recommended implementation date of Q4 2018.

### **Legislative Programme**

195. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for progressing the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill 2015 through Dáil Éireann; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5027/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** The Public Health (Alcohol) Bill is in the Programme for a Partnership Government. The Bill completed its passage through all stages in the Seanad on the 15 December 2017 and it is intended to bring the Bill into the Dail as soon as possible in 2018.

### **Hospital Beds Data**

196. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the bed capacity at the Sacred Heart Hospital, Castlebar, County Mayo; the number of beds that are vacant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5028/18]

**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.

### **Health Services Staff Data**

197. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the staffing levels at a facility (details supplied) in County Donegal; the various positions held including all clinical and all non-clinical roles as at 1 January 2016, 2017 and 2018 respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5039/18]

**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.

### **Hospital Staff Recruitment**

198. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if additional resources have been allocated to support a second consultant led adult diabetes team at Letterkenny university hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5040/18]

200. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if a full-time dietician based at Letterkenny University Hospital and dedicated to diabetes services is now in post; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5042/18]

201. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if the recently vacated diabetes clinical nurse specialist post at Letterkenny University Hospital has yet been advertised; the efforts being made to recruit for this role; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5043/18]

202. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if a suitable candidate has now been selected to fill the recently vacated paediatric diabetes clinical nurse specialist post at Letterkenny University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5044/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 198, 200 to 202, inclusive, together.

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

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

199. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the waiting times in respect of review appointments as part of adult diabetes services at Letterkenny University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5041/18]

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

*Questions Nos. 200 to 202, inclusive, answered with Question No. 198.*

### **Drugs Payment Scheme Coverage**

203. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the review of the decision not to reimburse and provide access to Translarna; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5058/18]

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

The HSE informed my Department of its decision not to reimburse Ataluren (Translarna) in July 2017. The HSE, in deciding not to reimburse Translarna, cited uncertainty around clinical evidence but advised the applicant that it would be open to reviewing any additional clinical evidence if any should become available. The HSE informed the applicant of this decision, in keeping with the requirements of the 2013 Act. The applicant has appealed the HSE's decision to the High Court, which is part of the statutory process under Section 27 of the 2013 Act.

As proceedings have issued against the HSE, this is now subject to the Courts process.

It would be inappropriate for me to comment on a matter currently before the Courts.

### **Medical Products**

204. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding Freestyle Libre for diabetics; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5077/18]

**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.

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

205. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the rationale for the decision to make Freestyle Libre available on the long term illness scheme for children and young persons only; when this will be made available to all persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5101/18]

**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.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

206. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if a person's (details supplied) need for an ear, nose and throat, ENT, consultation will be considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5102/18]

**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.

### **Internal Audits**

207. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if his Department has completed an external quality assurance assessment of its internal audit function as required by the Institute of Internal Auditors' standards that were introduced in 2012 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5113/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** My Department's internal audit function is guided by the Institute of Internal Auditors' Standards which were published by the Department of Expenditure and Reform (DPER) in November 2012. These Standards require that a quality assurance and improvement programme be developed for the function which involves both periodic internal assessments and external assessments being carried out every five years. Guidance provided by DPER suggested that these assessments be carried out in 2017. My Internal Audit Unit intends completing an internal quality assurance assessment in early 2018 followed by an external quality assessment which will be undertaken during 2018.

### **Hospital Consultant Recruitment**

208. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the efforts being made to secure a second permanent consultant to fill a recently vacated second post in relation to dermatology services at Sligo University Hospital; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there is only one permanent consultant covering the north west; the wait time for persons in the north west requiring an appointment with a consultant; the wait time for procedures; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5121/18]

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

### **Health Services Staff**

209. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if a dedicated attendant will be provided to accompany persons on a bus service which operates and transports service users to and from a day care centre (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5128/18]

**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.

The particular issue raised by the Deputy is a service matter for the HSE. Accordingly I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Hospital Deaths**

210. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the review by the HSE national women and infants health programme and quality assurance and verification division of the National Maternity Hospital's investigation into a maternal death at the hospital (details supplied). [5130/18]

218. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide that all direct maternal deaths in hospitals be subject to mandatory external review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5232/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 210 and 218 together.

My Department requested the HSE National Women & Infants Health Programme and Quality Assurance and Verification Division to review the National Maternity Hospital's investigation into a maternal death at the hospital, which occurred in May 2016. I can confirm that this review has been completed and recommends that all direct maternal deaths will be subject to a review external to the Maternity Network/Hospital Group. It is my belief that such a requirement will represent a significant step forward in terms of providing public assurance regarding the integrity of our review processes nationwide. In November last, I wrote to the Programme asking them to implement this recommendation immediately and I understand that this is in train. The Deputy may wish to be aware that this recommendation is reiterated in the Programme's Implementation Plan for the National Maternity Strategy which is available at:

*<http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/corporate/National-Maternity-Strategy-Implementation-Plan.pdf>.*

### **EU Directives**

211. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health the reason chiropractors here will be excluded from conducting or referring diagnostic exposure within the European Union (Basic Safety Standards for Protection against Dangers arising from Medical Exposure to Ionising Radiation) Regulations 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5133/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** This question relates 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.

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. The current regulations lack inspection or enforcement provisions. 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. Chiropractors that currently refer individuals for medical exposures, carry out medical exposures or other related functions are not in compliance with the existing regulations.

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.

### Home Care Packages Funding

212. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health when funding will be provided to the HSE to provide assistance towards a home care package (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5137/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** Homecare is an increasingly important part of the supports we offer to older people, and will continue to increase in importance into the future, as our ageing population grows.

The Department is currently engaged in a detailed process to develop plans for a new statutory scheme and system of regulation for home care services. While this is under development, both the Department and Health Service Executive (HSE) are continuing efforts to incrementally improve the existing home care services. As detailed in its *National Service Plan*, the HSE has begun work on streamlining home care services by moving towards a single funded home support service. This brings together the funding for home help and standard home care packages which will operate as a single home support service from 2018 onwards. The additional resources made available in 2018 bring the total budget for the direct provision of home support services to €408m.

This new approach will provide significant benefits for the service users, the public and the health system including:

- making the services easier to understand;
- streamlining the application processes resulting in only one application and decision being required for home support services for older people; and
- facilitating service users to move to changed levels of services as their assessed needs change, without the need for an additional application process.

The HSE's National Service Plan provides for a target of some 17.094m home support hours to be provided to 50,500 people, which compares with 16.34m hours delivered to 50,000 people (home help and home hours combined), an increase of 754,000 hours to 500 more people. In addition 235 intensive home care packages will provide 360,000 home support hours for people with complex needs.

Despite this significant level of service provision, the demand for Home Care continues to grow. It is important to note that the allocation of funding for home care across the system, though significant, is finite and services must therefore be delivered within the funding available. Home care is monitored on an on-going basis, to ensure that activity is maximised relative to individual clients' assessed care needs and within the overall available resources for home

care and having regard to demand throughout the year.

### **Medical Card Applications**

213. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will issue in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5181/18]

**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.

### **Primary Care Centres Provision**

214. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the number of primary care centres already built, operational and pending throughout County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5183/18]

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

### **Medical Card Applications**

215. **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. [5184/18]

**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.

### **Medical Card Applications**

216. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card will issue in case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5188/18]

**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 Data**

217. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the status of diagnosis or the determination of treatment in case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5189/18]

**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.

*Question No. 218 answered with Question No. 210.*

### **Home Care Packages Provision**

219. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if home care hours will be provided to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5233/18]

**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.

### **Apprenticeship Data**

220. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons enrolled in apprenticeships in his Department and State agencies under his remit by gender in tabular form; and if he will list each such apprenticeship. [5259/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I can confirm that no person is enrolled in an apprenticeship in my Department. In relation to Non-Commercial State Agencies under the aegis of the Department, this information is being sought and will be forwarded to you when collated. I have also asked the HSE respond to you directly.

## EU Directives

221. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health when he will sign a statutory instrument to give effect to the European Union (Basic Safety Standards for Protection against Dangers arising from Medical Exposure to Ionising Radiation) Regulations 2018; if qualified chiropractors will be included within the regulatory framework to ensure they can continue to use and operate x-ray apparatus as is the case in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5282/18]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** This question relates 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.

My Department 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 my 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 also posted on my Department's website. No response was received from the CAI 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.

## Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

222. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health his plans to extend the FreeStyle Libre blood glucose monitor to persons with diabetes under the long-term illness scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5287/18]

**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.

### **Greyhound Industry Data**

223. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he is satisfied with the statistics produced in relation to greyhound injury and deaths by the Irish Greyhound Board, IGB, for 2017 for Enniscorthy and Lifford in particular in which some of the columns in the statistics produced have been left blank. [5065/18]

224. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the full statistics for 2017 to include November and December which were missing from the original greyhound race injury and deaths report by the Irish Greyhound Board July to December 2014. [5066/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 223 and 224 together.

Bord na gCon is a commercial State body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958, chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry.

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

Bord na gCon has advised that the statistical report referred to by the Deputy was submitted to her in November 2017 and therefore statistics for November and December would not have been available at that time. Bord na gCon will furnish the information requested directly to the Deputy.

Bord na gCon has informed me that retrospective records are not available at the privately owned Lifford and Enniscorthy stadia. However race injury information will be available going forward at these stadia.

### **Tax Code**

225. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to introduce a scheme for persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5080/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** While taxation policy is primarily the responsibility of the Minister for Finance, I have on-going contact with him to ensure that taxation policy reflects the Government's commitment to agriculture and, in particular, to the policy objectives set out in the Agri-taxation Review and Food Wise 2025.

Income averaging for farmers is an important agri-taxation measure and it assists in addressing income volatility. I negotiated a change in the system in 2016, whereby a farmer can opt out of the system following a year of reduced income, resulting in improved cash flow. However I realise that the income averaging system is not suitable for all farmers and that it can only partially contribute to addressing income volatility. I have received a number of propos-

als modelled on income deferral schemes operated elsewhere and have been engaged with the Minister for Finance and various farm & industry organisations in this regard.

There are significant issues with these proposals, especially around EU State Aid rules and cost. Also there is no CAP direct payment equivalent in the countries in which this particular type of scheme currently operates and direct payments in themselves mitigate the effects of income volatility.

Nevertheless my concerns regarding income volatility and ongoing consultations with the Minister for Finance in this regard led to his announcement in the last Budget of a review of progress on the Agri-taxation Review, with a particular focus on the issue of income stabilisation. Our Departments have begun this process with a view to reporting later this year.

### **Agriculture Scheme Data**

226. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the cost of increasing the grant rate available for low emissions slurry spreading equipment to 60%. [5173/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Low Emission Slurry Spreading Scheme under TAMS II is a demand led Scheme. To date €3.14m has been paid to 283 approved applicants under the Scheme. It should be noted that under the relevant EU regulations the grant rate is set at 40% for eligible investments except in the case of eligible Young Farmers where the grant rate increases to 60%.

It is not possible therefore to fully quantify the cost of this proposal as it would depend on the level of demand and the category of applicants.

### **GLAS Payments**

227. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a GLAS 2016 payment will issue to a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay in rectifying the issue with regard to commonages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [4996/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1 October 2015 and has received the payment in respect of the 2015 scheme year.

The Department is aware of an issue with this case that has delayed the 2016 and 2017 payments. This case is prioritised for payment and I expect will be sorted in the very near future. GLAS payments are continuing to issue on a weekly basis.

### **GLAS Payments**

228. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a GLAS payment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5004/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The above

named was approved into GLAS 2 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2016. All payments owed to the applicant in respect of scheme year 2016 have issued.

Administrative checks must take place on all GLAS claims. All cases must clear validation checks before payment can issue. Department officials are working proactively to complete these checks. Once this case clears the validations the 2017 advance payment will be made. GLAS 2017 advance payments are being made on a weekly basis.

### **Agriculture Scheme Payments**

229. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if payments to a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5010/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** An application in respect of the 2017 Basic Payment Scheme/ Areas of Natural Constraints was received from the person named on 11 May 2017. Processing of this application has recently been finalised with payments scheduled to issue under both schemes in the coming days.

Administrative checks involving a number of sections within the Department take place on all GLAS claims. All cases must clear validation checks before payment can issue. Department officials are working proactively to complete the checks to allow for the issue of payments. Once this case clears validations the 2017 advance payment will be made. GLAS payments are being made on a weekly basis.

### **Knowledge Transfer Programme**

230. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to problems with issued knowledge transfer payments particularly for partnership farms; the steps he will take to rectify the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5021/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Knowledge Transfer is one of a suite of measures included under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and involves the formation of knowledge transfer groups across the beef, dairy, equine, sheep, tillage and poultry sectors. Farmer participants attend group meetings and produce a Farm Improvement Plan in consultation with their KT Facilitator. For each year of the three year programme participants receive a reimbursement in the amount of €750 for a primary sector and €375 for a secondary sector where all requirements of the programme have been met.

Payments under the programme commenced in late October 2017. To date circa €10.1 million has issued to 13,700 farmers. Officials in my Department are currently examining a number of partnership cases to ensure that there is a data match between individual Farm Improvement Plans and the individual farmer within the Register of Farm Partnerships. Every effort is being made to complete this process quickly with a view to paying affected farmers as soon as possible.

### **GLAS Payments**

231. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Ma-

rine the status of a Green, Low-Carbon, Agri-Environment Scheme, GLAS, payment for a person (details supplied); when the payment will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5022/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The above named was approved into GLAS 3 with a contract commencement date of 1 January 2017.

Administrative checks involving a number of sections within the Department take place on all GLAS claims. All cases must clear validation checks before payment can issue. Department officials are working proactively to complete the checks to allow for the issue of payments. Once this case clears validations the 2017 advance payment will be made. GLAS payments are being made on a weekly basis.

### **Flood Relief Schemes Payments**

232. **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 Inishowen flood relief measure 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5060/18]

**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 28th September 2017. The processing of this application is on-going and is expected to be finalised shortly.

### **Internal Audits**

233. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his Department has completed an external quality assurance assessment of its internal audit function as required by the Institute of Internal Audit standards that were introduced in 2012 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5103/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Internal Audit Unit in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is subject to an annual external quality assurance assessment. This assessment is carried out independently by one of the larger accounting firms in the context of that firm's role as Certifying Body for the Department.

### **Agrifood Sector**

234. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to outline the outcome of recent discussions he had with the European Agriculture and Trade Commissioners on the need to protect the agrifood sector here in negotiations on a possible Mercosur trade deal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5148/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Ireland's position is well-known as regards our opposition to any agreement that would have negative consequences for the Irish and EU agriculture sectors, and for the beef sector in particular. It has been reiterated many times, by myself at Council of Agriculture Ministers meetings and through direct contacts with Commissioners Hogan and Malmstroem, by other Ministers in the relevant EU Trade policy fora, and by the Taoiseach at European Council and through his own direct contacts, most recently with Commission President Jean Claude Juncker and French President

Emmanuel Macron. Indeed my colleague, Minister of State Andrew Doyle, made a very strong intervention on this point at this week's Council of Agriculture Ministers meeting in Brussels, and spoke to Commissioner Hogan on the matter.

I have been very consistent in urging caution in the approach to these negotiations, and have expressed Ireland's very grave concerns about the offer of a beef tariff rate quota of 70,000 tonnes made by the EU to Mercosur last October, and our determination not to have this exceeded. Indeed it was as a result of the efforts of Ireland and a number of like minded member states that a draft EU offer of 78,000 tonnes in April 2017 was ultimately not tabled.

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

### **Information and Communications Technology**

235. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to set out in tabular form the amount expended by his Department on information technology infrastructure by hardware and software in each of the years 2014 to 2017 relating to scheme payment systems; and the budget allocation for 2018. [5152/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** This Department makes extensive use of ICT systems and services to underpin all of its core activities; including areas such as animal health and welfare, food safety, fisheries and scheme payments.

Since 2015 the Department has introduced over 20 new Common Agriculture Policy Schemes and the vast bulk of these are now processed end to end by these digital systems. This transformative project has been achieved using the mix of internal staff and external support. The Department now has in place the necessary systems to ensure that it can deliver on its commitments over the coming years.

Ireland is to the fore in Europe in its delivery of Agriculture related systems to support payment of our varied schemes. This is evidenced by our ability to draw down CAP Pillar 2 funding at a rate that is 2nd only to Finland and this is facilitated by having the necessary ICT systems and supports in place. In addition we are consistently delivering EU schemes and payments in a more efficient manner than our EU paying agency peers.

The following Table 1 details the amount of expenditure incurred in the years 2014-2017 (2018 projected) in relation to ICT systems and hardware to support the varying scheme payments (including but not limited to BPS, ANC, BGDP, TAMS, Sheep Welfare, GLAS, Forestry and Knowledge Transfer).

The increase in expenditure in 2018 includes the initiation of a new Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) Rebuild project. This project will be delivered in two years and plans to implement a new state of the art LPIS, using up-to-date technologies and providing for increased accuracy.

**Table 1**

Year	Infrastructure (*)	Software Development
2014	11,873,884	4,521,646
2015	11,500,845	8,531,665
2016	9,833,734	10,282,447
2017	12,865,714	11,011,050
2018 (projected)	14,500,000	15,987,400

(\*)The Infrastructure expenditure relates to all of the ICT activities carried out by this department and includes, inter alia, communications (such as data lines and mobile), hardware (such as data centre, servers and endpoints), Internet Security and software (such as, desktop, servers, database and application support systems). In addition to scheme payments, it covers activities such as animal welfare, food safety, marine and desktop support for members of the Department, and also for other Department's on a shared service basis.

### Live Exports

236. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to set out the number of live cattle exports per head to each country in 2016 and 2017; the WTO tariff that would apply for live cattle exports to the UK in the absence of a trade agreement being formalised between the UK and EU if Britain decides to leave the Single Market and customs union. [5153/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Live cattle exports per head to each country in 2016 & 2017 were as follows:

-	2017	-	-	2016
Spain	50705	-	Spain	37006
Netherlands	41630	-	Netherlands	27036
Turkey	30568	-	North Ireland	24739
Northern Ireland	26073	-	Turkey	19262
Italy	19401	-	Italy	18237
Britain	5789	-	Britain	6666
Belgium	5525	-	France	5933
France	2778	-	Libya	2162
Libya	1832	-	Greece	1449
Romania	986	-	Romania	605
Greece	1093	-	Slovakia	531
Germany	469	-	Belgium	433
Russia	451	-	Hungary	361
Slovakia	298	-	Portugal	200
Hungary	80	-	Morocco	180
Bulgaria	57	-	Montenegro	154
Rwanda	54	-	Kosovo	66
Albania	52	-	Germany	65
Kosovo	35	-	Czech Republic	41
Czech Republic	9	-	Rwanda	39
Austria	4	-	Bulgaria	35
Total	187889	-	-	145200

The WTO does not set tariffs; it obliges members to offer the same trade advantages to all WTO members (Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status) unless the members are a party to a Regional Trade Agreement.

If the UK leaves the EU without a trade agreement, it may choose to set tariffs on imported live animals. The tariff rate, if any, is a matter for the UK.

My Department's approach in relation to the future trade relationship between the EU and UK will be to ensure that this is as close to the current arrangements as possible, thereby minimising the potential impact on the Irish live export sector.

## **Brexit Issues**

237. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to set out the WTO tariff that would apply to seafood exports to the UK in the absence of a trade agreement being formalised between the UK and EU if Britain decides to leave the Single Market and customs union. [5154/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** As Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade with special responsibility for Brexit, Minister Coveney has responsibility for coordinating the whole-of-Government response to Brexit. In this capacity, he is working closely with his colleagues across Government and state agencies to address the many challenges resulting from Brexit, providing their research, analysis and overall policy input to the Government's wider response to Brexit, including its priorities for the ongoing Article 50 negotiations between the EU and the UK.

However, every effort will continue to be made to ensure that the implications for the agri-food and fisheries sectors are fully taken account of, and that there will be as close alignment as possible with the current trade models. Ireland's key tasks in this regard will continue to be: continued free access to the UK market, without tariffs and with minimal additional customs and administrative procedures; minimisation of the risk from UK trade agreements with third countries; and maintenance of current access to fishing grounds in the UK zone in the Irish Sea, Celtic Sea and north of Donegal and protection of Ireland's quota shares.

As the outcome of the negotiations is not yet known, an important focus of the planning and preparation being undertaken through these structures is on deepening the Government's analysis and understanding of the exact consequences of a range of different possible scenarios. This represents an intensification of efforts to build on the Government's contingency planning.

In line with this whole-of-Government work, my Department has conducted a range of analysis and research activities in relation to Brexit. This work is ongoing, and is primarily concerned with the implications of Brexit for agrifood trade with the UK across different sectors.

For example, both internally and in consultation with the relevant stakeholders through the Brexit Stakeholder Consultative Committee and the All-Island Civic Dialogue process, my Department has established the extent of the seafood industry's reliance on the UK market, the potential implications of Brexit and the possible responses to the challenges presented. It has also been analysing the potential practical impact on the day-to-day functioning of trade flows, as well as potential WTO tariffs that might be applied to Ireland's seafood exports to the UK in the event of a 'hard' Brexit. The WTO tariffs for our top 18 seafood exports to the UK range from 2% to 25% with an average of approximately 12%. However, it is important to remember that the UK only accounted for 13% of Ireland's seafood exports in 2016 and an estimated 10% of Ireland's seafood exports in 2017.

## **Beef Data and Genomics Programme**

238. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to set out the number of herd owners who have outstanding genomic samples to submit under the beef data and genomics scheme. [5155/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Beef Data and Genomics Programme provides for six years of payments to farmers for completion of actions which deliver accelerated genetic improvement in the Irish national herd and improvement of its environmental sustainability.

To date, 306,000 samples have been returned for the 2017 Programme year. Of the 24,800 active participants in the Programme, 1,017 applicants have not returned 6,955 genomic samples.

The submission of genomic samples is a fundamental aspect of the Programme. Payments continue to issue as applicants become compliant.

## **TAMS Expenditure**

239. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to outline the outcome for the Exchequer and European funds committed to the TAMS 2 scheme, whereby approved applications that have yet to be drawn down will have expired by end of 2019 but which were approved in 2016 (details supplied); and whether it is the case that, if drawdown and expenditure do not meet expected levels, scheme funding cannot be automatically carried forward to the following year. [5156/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The seven measures under TAMS II are co-funded under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and is subject to the usual capital investment financial provisions. The level of approvals that have issued to date under the Scheme, which now stand at 12,758, are a testament to the success of the online application system which facilitates a far speedier turnaround of applications than under a manual based system.

However, the approvals have not as yet translated into a substantial level of claim activity. The funding committed to the TAMS II Schemes is €395m over the course of RDP. All approved participants who have completed their approved works are urged to submit a payment claim to draw down the available funding.

If an applicant has an approval which expires it is open to him/her under the Terms and Conditions of the TAMS Schemes to submit a new application. The situation as regards the later years of the scheme will be kept under review. Priority for now is to maximise expenditure for eligible applications for payment.

## **TAMS Administration**

240. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to outline his views on the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's spending review of the TAMS 2 scheme (details supplied) relating to underspend. [5157/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The seven

measures under TAMS II are co-funded under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. The level of approvals that have issued to date under the Scheme now stand at 12,758.

However, the approvals have not as yet translated into a substantial level of claim activity. The funding committed to the TAMS II Scheme is €395m over the course of RDP. All approved participants who have completed their approved works are urged to submit a payment claim to draw down the available funding.

The comments included in the spending review are noted. It is also worth noting that the timing of the review was at an earlier point in the programme and there has been significant activity in terms of approvals and payments subsequently. My Department has spent €11m on the TAMs in the last two months as there has been a noticeable pick up in submitted claims.

### **GLAS Expenditure**

241. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to outline the budget allocation for GLAS in 2017; the amount of funding expended; and the budget allocation for 2018. [5158/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** €213 million was allocated to GLAS in 2017 with €195.6 million of this expended. As per the Deputy's parliamentary question of 13th December last, €203 million has been allocated for 2018.

GLAS funding is fully committed for the duration of the scheme and payments in individual years may vary but will balance out over the lifetime of the scheme.

### **Knowledge Transfer Programme**

242. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to outline his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding a farm scheme. [5159/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Knowledge Transfer is one of a suite of measures included under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and involves the formation of knowledge transfer groups across the beef, dairy, equine, sheep, tillage and poultry sectors. Farmer participants attend group meetings and produce a Farm Improvement Plan in consultation with their KT Facilitator. For each year of the three year programme participants receive a reimbursement in the amount of €750 for a primary sector and €375 for a secondary sector where all requirements of the programme have been met.

Payments under the programme commenced in late October 2017. To date circa €10.1 million has issued to 13,700 farmers. Officials in my Department are currently examining a number of partnership cases to ensure that there is a data match between individual Farm Improvement Plans and the individual farmer within the Register of Farm Partnerships. Every effort is being made to complete this process with a view to paying affected farmers as soon as possible.

### **EU Directives**

243. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to outline his views on the conditions and criteria associated with the renewal of Ireland's nitrates derogation 2018 to 2021; and the steps he will take to help persons meet these condi-

tions. [5160/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** In December 2017, Ireland secured a renewal of our nitrates derogation for the period 2018 – 2021 on the basis of strengthened water protection measures. This contrasts with other EU member states which have had severe difficulties in negotiating successful renewals of their derogations.

The achievement of securing the renewal of the derogation is a significant milestone in the context of an expanding dairy herd and increasing milk production. While there are some additional stipulations attached to the derogation, these are the outcome of a year long negotiations with the Commission and two separate public consultations. It was important when seeking the renewal that Ireland demonstrated commitment to tackling agricultural impacts on water.

The measures in Ireland's derogation take account of the growing numbers of derogation farmers who are farming at intensive stocking rates, and also environmental objectives for water, climate change and ammonia which Ireland must achieve. Furthermore, opportunities for large savings on farms through better grassland management and improved timing and application of fertiliser have been taken into account.

Agriculture is responsible for 98% of ammonia emissions and under the National Emissions Ceiling Directive, Ireland must reduce its ammonia emissions by 5%, by 2030 compared to 2005. Ammonia losses from slurry are significantly reduced by slurry application in the spring-time and also by using low emission slurry spreading (LESS) equipment.

It is now required that 50% of slurry produced on a derogation farm must be applied by 15th June and after that date it may only be applied by LESS equipment. Furthermore derogation farmers must have adequate manure storage for their animals. These new measures will assist farmers to deliver their production targets, reduce their greenhouse gas and ammonia emissions and reduce the risk of runoff to water quality.

In order to help farmers with the purchase of LESS equipment, support is provided under the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme known as TAMS II is, subject to the terms and conditions of the Scheme, at a general grant rate of 40% rising to 60% for qualifying Young Farmers. The maximum amount of investment eligible for grant aid under the LESS measure is generally €40,000 per holding. It is also worth noting that the investment ceiling under this measure is, uniquely among all TAMS II measures, not subject to the overall TAMS II investment ceiling of €80,000 per holding.

### **Agriculture Schemes**

244. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to outline his views on having a yellow card approach for cross-compliance inspections as pertains with land eligibility checks. [5161/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The EU regulations governing the Cross Compliance regime provides that where a breach of any of the requirements is deemed to be minor and remedial action is taken within a specified period, no monetary sanction will apply.

The "Yellow Card" provision in relation to land eligibility checks applies to those cases where a determined over-declaration in area is greater than 3% or 2 hectares, but does not exceed 10%. For such cases the penalty will be further reduced by 50%, subject to specific additional criteria.

My Department applies both of these provisions.

### Forestry Data

245. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to set out in tabular form the percentage of agricultural land in each county that has been planted with forestry to date. [5162/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Forestry is one of the many land use options available to farmers and land owners and the Afforestation Grant and Premium Scheme is one of a wide range of supports provided by my Department. In 2017, 5,536 hectares of new forestry was planted nationally.

My Department compiles a number of different afforestation statistics annually, which are made available on my Department's website. The National Forest Inventory and the Ireland's Forests - Annual Statistics 2016 are available on the website and are invaluable sources of statistical information on Ireland's forest estate.

The area of land afforested in each county is indicated in the following table, which is taken from the National Forest Inventory. The area of forest is estimated to be 731,650 ha or 10.5% of the total land area of Ireland (NFI 2012).

It is not possible to provide the percentage of agricultural land afforested in each county as there is no information available on the total agricultural area in each county.

County	% Area
Carlow	9.4
Cavan	8.7
Clare	16.4
Cork	11.2
Donegal	11.6
Dublin	5.7
Galway	9.7
Kerry	11.2
Kildare	6.1
Kilkenny	9.2
Laois	14.7
Leitrim	16.7
Limerick	9.8
Longford	7.7
Louth	2.9
Mayo	9.2
Meath	5.3
Monaghan	4.3
Offaly	12.2
Roscommon	10.2
Sligo	11.2
Tipperary	11.2

County	% Area
Waterford	14.4
Westmeath	7.2
Wexford	5.9
Wicklow	17.7
Total	10.5

### Herd Data

246. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of suckler herd numbers per county in each of the years 2010 to 2017, in tabular form; and the number of suckler farmers per county [5163/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I will forward the information sought by the deputy in relation to the breakdown of suckler farmers by county shortly.

I am very much aware of the importance of the suckler sector to Ireland's rural economy and the wider agrifood industry. My Department currently provides a range of supports to the suckler herd. A number of direct payment and grant schemes provide vital income and investment support to the suckler sector, including BPS, ANC, GLAS and TAMS.

The Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) is the main support specifically targeted for the suckler sector, which provides Irish beef farmers with some €300 million in funding over the current Rural Development Programme period. Responding to significant demand, last year I reopened the BDGP programme for new entrants, reflecting the success of this programme, which targets both the environmental footprint and the profitability of the suckler herd through improving the genetic merit in participating herds. There are currently approximately 25,000 herds covered between the two schemes.

### Forestry Data

247. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the planting targets in hectares in each of the years 2010 to 2017, in tabular form; the number of hectares planted in each year; and the number of hectares planted out of each annual target set on a percentage basis. [5165/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The National Development Plan 2007-2013 set out planting targets for the period 2007 - 2013 at 10,000ha per annum. The figure for 2014 is based on the maximum planting level achievable within the budget provided that year, which was 7,000ha. Targets for 2015 - 2020 are set out in the Forestry Programme 2014 - 2020. The following table lists these figures;

-	Target	Planted (ha)	% of target achieved
2010	10,000	8,314	83%
2011	10,000	6,653	67%
2012	10,000	6,652	67%
2013	10,000	6,252	63%

-	Target	Planted (ha)	% of target achieved
2014	7,000	6,156	88%
2015	6,000	6,293	105%
2016	6,660	6,500	98%
2017	7,140	5,536	78%

### Forestry Sector

248. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to concerns expressed by farming groups regarding the decision taken by the Forest Service to increase the compulsory broadleaf area from 10% to 15% is the wrong approach. [5166/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Let me state at the outset that all relevant stakeholders, including the farming organisation concerned, were informed in advance of this proposal to increase in the minimum mandatory broadleaf requirement per site from 10% to 15%. No objections were raised at the time.

A specific condition of State aid approval for the Forestry Programme 2014-2020 is to aim for annual planting of 30% broadleaves; at this point in the Programme, this target has not been achieved. The Department carried out a Mid-Term Review(MTR) of the Forestry Programme during 2017 and our analysis showed that the 2018-2020 afforestation target levels and the broadleaf planting target of 30% of overall planting may not be achieved within existing structures.

In response to these issues a suite of proposals were included in the MTR to encourage more landowners to plant broadleaves. In addition to the increase in the minimum mandatory requirement per site for broadleaves referred to in the Deputy's question, the following initiatives were also included;

- A 7% increase in grants and a 5% increase in premium rates for broadleaf and diverse conifer planting categories;

- Additional support for broadleaf management in the form of a second thinning grant;

- Tree guards and deer fencing grants are being introduced as part of a new "Forest Fencing and Tree Shelter Scheme" to reduce the risk of deer damage for existing broadleaf forests.

- Agroforestry premiums have been increased from €280/ha to €615/ha with the grant rate increased from €3,950/ha to €5,750/ha.

The Department is confident that the introduction of these measures will ensure that Ireland meets its commitment under our State Aid approval to reach the broadleaf planting target of 30% of overall planting.

### Trade Agreements

249. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the reports that the European Commission is to propose a yearly tariff rate quota of 90,000 tonnes of beef, 20,000 tonnes more than offered in October 2017, to South American countries in the latest round of Mercosur negotiations; and if a final deal in which a

beef offer is a component will not be supported. [5167/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I do not propose to comment on speculation about likely developments in relation to the EU-Mercosur trade negotiations. Ireland's position is well-known as regards our opposition to any agreement that would have negative consequences for the Irish and EU agriculture sectors, and for the beef sector in particular. It has been reiterated many times, by myself at Council of Agriculture Ministers meetings and through direct contacts with Commissioners Hogan and Malmstroem, by other Ministers in the relevant EU Trade policy fora, and by the Taoiseach at European Council and through his own direct contacts, most recently with Commission President Jean Claude Juncker and French President Emmanuel Macron.

I have been very consistent in expressing Ireland's very grave concerns about the offer of a beef tariff rate quota of 70,000 tonnes made by the EU to Mercosur last October, and our determination not to have this exceeded.

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

### **Animal Slaughtering Standards**

250. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the sentiments expressed by persons (details supplied) with the policy of some meat factories and his Department to implement a clean sheep policy. [5172/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Food legislation requires that primary producers rearing animals or producing primary products of animal origin are to take adequate measures to ensure the cleanliness of animals going to slaughter. My Department has, accordingly, developed a clean livestock policy which has been agreed with farmer, haulier and Food Business Operator stakeholders. The policy document was finalised in February 2017. This policy is a public health measure, intended to reduce the potential risk to consumers that may arise if meat is contaminated by dirty fleeces.

The cleanliness of a fleece is related to the farming practices from where the sheep originates as well as being influenced by the stakeholders along the supply chain. All stakeholders can influence the cleanliness of the sheep fleece.

Teagasc has produced "A Guide for Sheep Producers", which sets out key advisory recommendations for sheep producers to assist them in the production of sheep with fleece that are suitable for slaughter for human consumption, a copy of this guide was issued to all registered flockowners along with the 2017 sheep census forms in early December 2017. My Department has also written to all sheep farmers and transporters directly. Full details regarding the policy are available on the Department's website - <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/foodsafetyconsumerissues/foodsafetycontrolsonmeat/cleanlivestockpolicy/>

The production of sheep meat suitable for human consumption is the primary objective and responsibility of the food business operator in line with food legislation. Each food business operator must draw up procedures to demonstrate how they achieve this. This involves a fleece

evaluation and actions, as necessary, to ensure cleanliness of the fleece prior to slaughter.

My Department oversees the production of sheep meat to ensure that it meets the standards necessary for consumers and our trading partners.

The need for an effective clean livestock policy is regarded as being very important not just in terms of basic food safety, but also as a reputational issue for Ireland's meat industry and our export trade.

Our clean livestock policy is vital for the protection of the consumer and to protect our export markets.

### **Fur Farming**

251. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there have been new applications for fur farming licences in the past 12 months. [5219/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** There have been no new applications for fur farming licences in the last 12 months.

### **Fur Farming**

252. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 132 of 24 January 2018, if his attention has been drawn to the fact parts of the 2016 inspection reports have not been fully complied with including many answers left blank, an absence of signatures and details of identification of businesses; his views on whether this conforms to rigorous controls; if his Department has pursued the completion of these incomplete inspection reports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5220/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I presume that the Deputy is referring to information released on foot of a Freedom of Information request processed in 2017.

In that request an individual sought all inspection reports for fur farms in 2016. My Department is required to comply with the Freedom of Information Act 2014 and in that regard certain information, in this case the business name and address the subject of the inspection, was redacted under Section 32 and Section 37 of the Act.

The questions referred to by the Deputy were not applicable at the time the inspection was being carried out i.e. the questions referred to the period in which slaughter is carried out. I understand that the reports referred to were loaded and signed off electronically on my Department's Farm Inspections Database.(AFIT).

### **Road Safety**

253. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of the regulation on sulky racing. [5238/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The use of sulkys on the public roads is governed by the Road Traffic Acts which impose an obligation on persons engaged in any activity on the public roads, including the driving of sulkys, to drive

their vehicles with due care for other road users and not to indulge in dangerous driving of the vehicles.

In addition to the Road Traffic Acts, local authorities also have powers under the Control of Horses Act, 1996 to introduce bye-laws regulating activities involving horses in their respective functional areas.

All persons employing animals for any purpose, including sulky drivers, must also comply with the Animal Health & Welfare Act 2013 which prohibits a person from carrying out any activity in a manner that causes unnecessary pain and suffering or endangerment to the health or welfare of an animal in their control.

### **Apprenticeship Data**

254. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons enrolled in apprenticeships in his Department and State agencies under his remit by gender in tabular form; and if he will list each such apprenticeship. [5249/18]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** There are no individuals currently enrolled in apprenticeships in my Department.

The question of apprenticeships within the State Agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each Agency.

In accordance with the new procedures effective since September 2016, as notified by the Clerk of the Dáil, my Department has provided contact details for all of our agencies. Details of dedicated email addresses for State Bodies are available for Oireachtas members through the Clerk of Dáil Éireann.

### **Litter Pollution**

255. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the measures his Department has in place to address roadside littering; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5016/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** My Department provides the legislative framework to combat litter pollution. Under the Litter Pollution Acts 1997 to 2009, the management and enforcement response to littering is a matter primarily for local authorities. While enforcement is indeed critical, I believe that a sustainable long term solution to the issue of litter is best achieved through a combination of enforcement, education, awareness and, of course, individuals taking personal responsibility. My Department commissions an annual National Litter Pollution Monitoring Survey (NLPMS) Report (<http://litter.ie>). Overall, the trend of results demonstrates that the litter position has been improving, year on year. When the 2016 NLPMS report identified a very slight deterioration in the litter situation, I took immediate action on the issue by increasing 2017 funding for the local authority Anti-Litter and Anti-Graffiti Awareness Grant Scheme (ALAGS) scheme by 28% to €884,000. I also increased funding for the National Spring Clean by €40,000. I intend to maintain these levels of increased funding for 2018. My Department also supports the Irish Business Against Litter (IBAL) Litter League, and has negotiated agreements with the banking industry and the chewing gum industry. It also supports the Green Schools Programme, which is key to effecting a long-term change in societal attitudes towards litter disposal.

Last year, I also launched a €1.3 million anti-dumping initiative, through which my Department works in partnership with local authorities and community organisations in identifying high risk or problem areas, developing appropriate enforcement responses and carrying out clean-up operations. 229 anti-dumping projects throughout Ireland were supported in 2017. These included monitoring and surveillance of dumping black-spots and the development of an integrated and effective approach to dealing with this issue.

### **Litter Pollution**

256. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a national campaign to highlight the negative impact littering and dumping has on the environment and the local community will be initiated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5017/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** My Department takes a multifaceted approach to tackling the litter and dumping problem, incorporating enforcement, public awareness and education. Funding is made available to support a range of anti-litter initiatives to combat litter across the country, including:

- The Local Authority Anti-Litter & Anti-Graffiti Awareness Grant Scheme

- The National Spring Clean,
- The Green Schools Program, and
- Irish Business Against Litter (IBAL) - Litter League.

The Anti-Litter and Anti-Graffiti Awareness Grant Scheme support projects that promote greater public awareness and education in relation to litter and graffiti. Typically, projects include local media campaigns, clean-ups, primary/secondary school competitions, exhibitions and the production of videos, posters and leaflets which all contribute to raising awareness around the effect that littering has on our environment.

In recognition of the impact of illegal dumping on communities across the country, I launched an anti-dumping initiative in 2017 to provide funding for projects tackling illegal dumping including the provision of support for the clean-up, monitoring and surveillance of dumping black-spots. These funds have been used to support 229 clean-up and restorative projects led by community, environmental and sporting groups across the country. The “before and after” reports from the projects that received funding illustrate the effectiveness of the range of clean-up and restorative projects which have positively impacted on towns and villages across the country.

A review of last year’s initiative has been undertaken to inform a proposed 2018 anti-dumping work programme that will place an increased emphasis on all actors who facilitate the unauthorised movement and disposal of waste, to continue to address dumping black spots, increase awareness of the harmful effects of this illegal activity and target those who show such disregard for their communities and environment.

### **Postal Codes**

257. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of a new Eircode (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5033/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** Eircodes are assigned to new property addresses using a valid postal address and verified geo-locations. An Post collects information on new and existing buildings, as well as changes to existing addresses and Ordnance Survey Ireland provides the geo-locations for these buildings. An Post GeoDirectory, a subsidiary company of An Post and Ordnance Survey Ireland, issue a new release of the GeoDirectory database file on a quarterly basis to Eircode in accordance with their licence agreement. Each new address assigned an Eircode is published on the free to use Eircode Finder website and a notification letter issued to the occupant containing the Eircode of that address.

My Department has requested Eircode to contact and liaise directly with the individual regarding the assignment of an Eircode to this non-unique address.

### **Professional Qualifications**

258. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on an organisation’s (details supplied) endeavours to be included in updated regulations in view of the service it has provided over the years; and if he will request the Department of Health to approve these amendments. [5067/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The issue of clinical competence and recognition of practitioners is, in this instance, a matter for the Minister for Health.

My Department has no role or function in this matter.

### **Radioactive Waste**

259. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the contact that has been made with the British Government and his views on a recent consultation in Britain with proposals that would see a part of the island of Ireland being used to dispose of nuclear waste; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5100/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** There are presently no plans to site a geological waste facility for radioactive or nuclear waste on the island of Ireland. Following previous unsuccessful attempts to identify a long-term geological waste facility, the United Kingdom’s Department of for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has launched a consultation paper on how to better engage and represent communities across England and Northern Ireland in any future process to consider siting a geological waste facility. The consultation paper notes that “the process to identify and select a site for a geological disposal facility requires detailed technical work that is estimated to take around 15 to 20 years”. The paper further points out that any future proposals on the siting of such a facility in Northern Ireland would be subject to planning decisions made by the Northern Ireland Administration. The United Kingdom-Ireland Contact Group on Radiological Matters, comprising officials from UK and Irish Government Departments and scientific Agencies responsible for ensuring radiological safety, meet biannually to discuss matters of interest to both parties, including existing and planned installations, transport of radiological materials, and long-term strategies to safely store radiological and nuclear waste. Ireland will engage on this matter through this Group and continue to monitor developments in this area.

### **Internal Audits**

260. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his Department has completed an external quality assurance assessment of its internal audit function as required by the Institute of Internal Audit standards that were introduced in 2012 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5106/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) sets the requirements in relation to internal audit in the public sector. In November 2012, DPER issued Revised Internal Audit Standards for Central Government which determined that the Institute of Internal Auditors International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing (IIA Standards) would apply across all Government Departments. Under standard 1300 of the IIA Standards (Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme), Internal Audit Units are required to carry out external assessments at least once every five years. The purpose of the external assessment is to assess conformance with the IIA Standards and assessments may be accomplished either through a full external assessment or a self-assessment with independent external validation.

In July 2017, my Department's Internal Audit Unit carried out a self-assessment of their activities which concluded that the unit generally conforms to the IIA Standards. Generally conforms means that the relevant structures, policies, and procedures of the activity, as well as the processes by which they are applied, comply with the requirements of the individual Standard or element of the Code of Ethics in all material respects.

In August 2017 my Department engaged Crowe Horwath to provide the required independent external validation. The purpose of the validation was to verify the assertions made in the self-assessment concerning adequate fulfilment of the internal audit activity and its conformity to IIA Standards. In their Independent Validation Statement, Crowe Horwath concurred with the results of Internal Audit Unit's conclusion in the self-assessment that the activity generally conforms to the IIA's Standards.

### **Broadband Service Provision**

261. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when fibre broadband will be rolled out at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5122/18]

262. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when fibre broadband will be rolled out at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5123/18]

263. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when fibre broadband will be rolled out at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5124/18]

264. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when fibre broadband will be rolled out at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5125/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 261 to 264, inclusive, together.

The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband

access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland now have access to high speed broadband. Within a year that will rise to nearly 8 out of 10 premises and by 2020 9 out of 10 premises or 90% of premises will have access to high speed broadband.

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

The Map is colour coded and searchable by address/eircode:

- The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP and are the subject of an ongoing procurement process.

- The BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services.

- The Light BLUE areas represent eir's commercial rural deployment plans to roll out high speed broadband to 300,000 premises by the end of 2018 as part of an Agreement signed with me in April.

The table details percentage of premises to be covered by the State Intervention and through commercial investment in the areas identified by the Deputy.

County Name	Townland	AMBER Premises within the NBP Intervention Area	BLUE Premises within Commercial Operator's Area	LIGHT BLUE premises planned rural deployment
Cork	Gurteenroe	17% (102)	83% (512)	
	Goranenagappul(Clondrohid)	15% (15)	85% (87)	
	Ryecourt(Cloughduv)	9% (8)	87% (79)	4% (4)
	Coolmucky(Cloughduv)	45% (38)	55% (47)	

One bidder, eir, publicly withdrew from the procurement process on 30 January, citing "commercial, regulatory and governance issues". While this is regrettable, it is a commercial decision for eir to make. The procurement process continues with the enet/sse consortium

The specialist NBP procurement team will continue to engage intensively with all relevant stakeholders to ensure the earliest possible achievement of the Government's objective of providing reliable high quality, high speed broadband to all premises in Ireland. When the procurement process reaches a satisfactory conclusion for Government, a contract will be awarded and the network roll-out will commence.

The NBP procurement process is supported by a Steering Group and Procurement Board, both of which include highly respected international experts with extensive relevant experience and by a specialist procurement team of over 80 people with comprehensive financial, funding, technical and procurement expertise and experience. With a single bidder focus there are opportunities for reducing the timeline for the procurement process to progress to a conclusion, which is good news for citizens waiting for high speed broadband.

Delivering high speed broadband to citizens across Ireland remains a firm commitment of mine and this Government. 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 reconfirmed its committed to completing the roll out by the end of

2018. Information on eir's planned rural deployment is available at <http://fibrerollout.ie/eir-code-lookup/>. A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my Department's website [www.dccae.gov.ie](http://www.dccae.gov.ie). Quarterly updates on eir's rural deployment are published on this website. Although deployment figures for Q4 2017 have not yet been verified by my Department's teams, I understand eir has passed over 120,000 of the committed premises to date.

Prior to the roll-out of the NBP State led intervention, practical initiatives continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband 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.

### **Communications Market Regulation**

265. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on providing the Commission for Communications Regulation with enhanced powers to address compliance issues across the industry to allow for more direct intervention; his further views on the nature of such powers; his views on whether the proposed Communications Regulation (Amendment) Bill is an appropriate method for their introduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5126/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), established pursuant to the provisions of the Communications Regulation Act 2002 (as amended) is the statutory independent regulator of the electronic communications and postal markets. In addition, ComReg is empowered to investigate suspected breaches of competition law in respect of electronic communications and related services. The proposed Communications Regulation (Amendment) Bill will confer certain additional powers on the Commission for Communications Regulation in connection with the National Broadband Plan.

My officials and I engage with ComReg on a regular basis, on a wide variety of regulatory matters. Among the issues discussed with ComReg is that of enhanced enforcement powers, and we will be continuing that engagement in light of developments at national and EU level. The most appropriate mechanism to implement any required changes will be explored at that point.

### **Communications Market Regulation**

266. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on wholesale market competition and the necessity to create the environment and appropriate structures to drive this further; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5127/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** The provision of electronic telecommunications services by private operators, including

wholesale services, occurs within a fully liberalised market. Decisions by those operators with regard to all matters pertaining to the delivery of the service, including wholesale mobile services, are a matter for the service provider concerned. The regulation of the telecommunications market and the companies operating within it, to the extent permitted by law, is a statutory function of the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) in accordance with the Communications Regulation Act 2002.

ComReg is statutorily independent in the exercise of its functions and is directly accountable for the performance of its functions to the Oireachtas.

### **Energy Prices**

267. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the action he is taking to address the problem of higher utility charges for persons with pre-pay meters and the lack of competition for this market; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5129/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** Electricity and gas markets in Ireland are commercial and liberalised, and operate within national and European regulatory regimes, supported by legislation. Government has no statutory function in the regulation of energy markets or the setting of gas or electricity prices. The position of successive Governments has been that competitive energy markets result in greater choice for consumers and businesses, in terms of suppliers, products and prices. Competition drives down consumer prices. Responsibility for the regulation of the electricity and gas markets is solely a matter for the independent regulator, the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU), which was assigned responsibility for the regulation of the Irish electricity market following the enactment of the Electricity Regulation Act, 1999 and subsequent legislation. The CRU licences the supply of electricity under section 14 (1) of the Electricity Regulation Act, 1999, and it has licensed a number of suppliers, which offer a range of electricity services, including, in the case of several firms, prepay meters.

The CRU ceased regulating electricity retail prices in April 2011 and gas prices in 2014, and prices are set on a commercial and operational basis by all suppliers, including those providing prepay meters. The CRU monitors retail energy markets to ensure that competition continues to develop. It also oversees non-price aspects of competition and has taken steps to facilitate market access for new supplier firm entrants and to increase transparency and consumer engagement in retail markets. The CRU is accountable for the performance of its functions, including the monitoring of retail market competition, to a committee of the Oireachtas, and not to Government.

### **Waste Management Regulations**

268. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the position regarding the establishment of a regulator for the waste industry. [5231/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** I have established a Household Waste Collection Price Monitoring Group (PMG) to monitor the rates charged by household waste collectors and to date the PMG has met on five separate occasions: 13 September, 11 October, 14 November, 12 December and 9 January 2018 and considered four months of pricing data trends. Statements by the PMG have been released

on a monthly basis since November 2017 and are available on my Department's website as details of the role and membership of the group as well as the market analysis of the cost of household waste collection carried out by the group in December, 2017. In addition, the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) is conducting a study on the operation of the household waste collection market. The CCPC has indicated that it hopes to finalise the study in 2018.

The results from the PMG will be monitored and analysed and in conjunction with the study being undertaken by the CCPC will provide an evidence base regarding the future monitoring or the potential need for additional regulation of the waste market.

### **Apprenticeship Data**

269. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of persons enrolled in apprenticeships in his Department and State agencies under his remit, by gender, in tabular form; and if he will list each such apprenticeship. [5252/18]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten):** There are no persons enrolled in apprenticeships in my Department.

The information requested regarding the agencies under the aegis of my Department is an operational matter for each Agency. I will request the relevant bodies to reply directly to the Deputy with the information requested in respect of their organisation.

### **Coast Guard Services**

270. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he is satisfied that the Coast Guard is not defined as a principal response agency in view of it being the body with the apparent responsibility and developed expertise in search and rescue operations in Irish waters. [5034/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Irish Coast Guard is designated as a Principal Emergency Service within the Framework for Emergency Management, rather than a Principal Response Agency. This designation has not prevented or impeded the IRCG from carrying out an effective response to search and rescue situations or the discharge of its functions generally.

### **Rail Services Provision**

271. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the overcrowding issues on peak rail services on the Docklands M3 Parkway route will be addressed; if more carriages will be added to these peak services in order to address the problem of overcrowding; his views on whether this overcrowding will discourage persons from using public transport; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Docklands area is set for further development which will create greater demand for a high quality rail service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5018/18]

**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.

### **Pension Provisions**

272. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to ensure that CIÉ makes funding available to the 10,000 active members of its two pension schemes for independent legal advice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5030/18]

273. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there are issues with the two CIÉ pension schemes; if funding for independent legal advice will be made available to the members of these schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5035/18]

274. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there will be an independent investigation into the governance of the two CIÉ pension schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5036/18]

275. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on his Department's correspondence with CIÉ regarding the 10,000 membership of the CIÉ pension schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5037/18]

276. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to ensure that CIÉ makes funding available to the 10,000 active members of its two pension schemes for independent legal advice. [5048/18]

277. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to initiate an independent investigation into the governance of the two CIÉ pension schemes. [5049/18]

278. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will intervene with CIÉ on behalf of the 10,000 membership of the CIÉ pension schemes to oblige the company to answer all outstanding questions. [5050/18]

279. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps he has taken to ensure that Córas Iompair Éireann makes funding available for independent legal advice for the 10,000 members of its pension scheme to investigate the problems in those schemes. [5051/18]

280. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to initiate an independent investigation into the governance of the two Córas Iompair Éireann pension schemes. [5052/18]

281. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to ensure that Córas Iompair Éireann answers all outstanding questions raised on behalf of the 10,000 membership relating to issues surrounding the CIÉ pension schemes. [5053/18]

285. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the CIÉ pension fund has been underfunded in terms of the company contributions in each of the years 2009 to 2017 and to date in 2018; and the steps he will take to direct it to address the shortfall in order to ensure the fund is fully solvent and that there is no threat to fund members' pensions. [5091/18]

286. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if

his attention has been drawn to the fact that Córas Iompair Éireann submitted severely flawed funding submissions to the Pensions Authority that do not fully reflect the reality of the situation in regard to the current and future funding of the defined benefit pensions of up to 10,000 members of the CIÉ pension scheme. [5094/18]

287. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to investigate if the election process to the CIÉ pension fund management committee was in compliance with regulations. [5096/18]

289. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if CIÉ will make funding available to the 10,000 active members of its two pension schemes for independent legal advice. [5134/18]

290. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if an independent investigation into the governance of the two CIÉ pension schemes will be initiated. [5135/18]

291. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if CIÉ will answer all of the outstanding questions asked on behalf of the 10,000 membership of the CIÉ pension schemes. [5136/18]

293. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to initiate an independent investigation into the governance of the two CIÉ pension schemes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5221/18]

294. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to ensure that CIÉ makes funding available to the 10,000 active members of its two pension schemes for independent legal advice; his further plans to initiate an independent investigation into the governance of the two CIÉ pension schemes; and his plans to ensure that CIÉ answers all outstanding questions asked on behalf of the 10,000 members of the CIÉ pension schemes. [5222/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 272 to 281, inclusive, 285 to 287, inclusive, 289 to 291, inclusive, 293 and 294 together.

Issues in relation to Córas Iompair Éireann (CIÉ) pension schemes are primarily a matter for the trustees of the pension schemes, the CIÉ Group and their employees.

In a Topical Issues debate in this House on 6 December 2017, I outlined the challenges faced in addressing the solvency of the schemes and the process underway to address the deficit which involves detailed discussion between CIÉ and employee representatives, facilitated by the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). I said that CIÉ was on record at the WRC that it will not impose any change that it proposes without the agreement of the active members of both schemes and that it will continue to contribute to both schemes in accordance with the rules of the schemes. I am informed that this remains CIÉ's position in order to bring about a set of proposals that could form the basis of the trustees' submission to the Pensions Authority and that it continues to engage with the WRC.

I recently received correspondence in regard to the issues raised by Deputies and I will be responding in due course. In the meantime, I have referred the Deputies questions to CIÉ for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

## Taxi Regulations

282. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way in which taxi drivers were informed of the need to recalibrate and seal their meters for the new fare regime which will come into force from 1 February 2018; when taxi drivers were informed of these requirements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5057/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry, including those relating to equipment (such as taximeters) and the setting of maximum fares, is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

In order to be of assistance, I have referred your correspondence to the NTA for their consideration and direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

## Córas Iompair Éireann

283. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if correspondence (details supplied) will be examined regarding the CIÉ pension scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5075/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Issues in relation to Córas Iompair Éireann (CIÉ) pension schemes are primarily a matter for the trustees of the pension schemes, the CIÉ Group and their employees.

In a Topical Issues debate in this House on 6 December 2017, I outlined the challenges faced in addressing the solvency of the schemes and the process underway to address the deficit which involves detailed discussion between CIÉ and employee representatives, facilitated by the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). I said that CIÉ was on record at the WRC that it will not impose any change that it proposes without the agreement of the active members of both schemes and that it will continue to contribute to both schemes in accordance with the rules of the schemes. I am informed that this remains CIÉ's position in order to bring about a set of proposals that could form the basis of the trustees' submission to the Pensions Authority and that it continues to engage with the WRC.

I recently received the correspondence referred to by the Deputy and I will be responding in due course. In the meantime, I have referred the Deputy's question to CIÉ for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

## Dublin Airport Authority

284. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the income and profit on parking at Dublin Airport for each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5085/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The matter raised by the Deputy in relation to income and profit on parking at Dublin Airport is an operational matter for daa which has statutory responsibility to operate, manage and develop the Airport. I am aware however that private operators also offer parking facilities in the environs of Dublin Airport and the information sought may be commercially sensitive. Nevertheless, I have for-

warded the Question to daa for direct reply. If the Deputy does not receive a reply within ten working days, please advise my Private Office.

*Questions Nos. 285 to 287, inclusive, answered with Question No. 272.*

### **Internal Audits**

288. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department has completed an external quality assurance assessment of its internal audit function as required by the Institute of Internal Audit standards that were introduced in 2012 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5118/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The last external quality assurance assessment of the internal audit function in my Department was carried out in late 2008 with the resulting report being adopted by the Department's Audit Committee in March 2009. This exercise was conducted in accordance with the standards of the Institute of Internal Auditors.

A further external quality assessment has been scheduled to take place in 2018.

*Questions Nos. 289 to 291, inclusive, answered with Question No. 272.*

### **Driver Licences**

292. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a replacement French driver's licence or international version thereof can be provided in case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5186/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I cannot comment on individual cases.

As a matter of law, Ireland, like France, operates within an EU framework of driver licensing. Among other matters, EU law prescribes that each Member State issues driving licences only to those normally resident in their jurisdiction. If a person who holds a driving licence from one Member State takes up residence in another, they should exchange their licence for the equivalent issued by their new state of residence.

If a person holds a driving licence from a Member State and resides temporarily in another Member State for a fixed period of work or study, they may still be considered to be 'normally resident' in the state which issued their licence, and may therefore renew it.

The holding of a US driving licence has no relevance, and neither does an International Driving Permit, which is simply a restatement in an internationally agreed form of the person's national driving licence.

*Questions Nos. 293 and 294 answered with Question No. 272.*

### **Road Projects Status**

295. **Deputy Declan Breathnach** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the planning permission for the proposed Narrow Water bridge is still valid and effective; the

communication he has had with the Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland and with Newry, Mourne and Down District Council on the project; if funding will be made available for the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5236/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Under Section E of the Fresh Start Agreement of the 17 November 2015, the then Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government agreed to undertake a review of the proposed Narrow Water Bridge project with a view to identifying options for its future development, for consideration by the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC). In this context, following on from consultation with stakeholders, an options paper has been under preparation in relation to a bridge at Narrow Water.

I understand that when the various options have been further developed it is intended to engage in some further stakeholder consultation and it is intended that this will commence shortly.

In the absence of the Northern Ireland Executive the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) cannot meet but it is envisaged that the options paper will be considered once the NSMC is reconvened.

I have no role in relation to the planning status of the previous proposal for a bridge at Narrow Water and this is a matter for the relevant authorities.

### **Apprenticeship Data**

296. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of persons enrolled in apprenticeships in his Department and State agencies under his remit, by gender, in tabular form; and if he will list each such apprenticeship. [5264/18]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** My Department does not provide apprenticeships.

I have asked the State agencies under the aegis of my Department to provide the Deputy with the information requested. If he does not receive a reply from the agencies within ten working days, he should advise my private office.

### **Education Welfare Service**

297. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the provisions being put in place in terms of access to schools (details supplied) in County Monaghan; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4989/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Tusla Educational Welfare Service (EWS) has advised my Department that it works with the Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres (EROC) throughout the country supporting the provision of education of the children in these centres. The Educational Welfare Officers assigned to the EROC centres work closely with the Educational Welfare Officers in the receiving counties to ensure that applications to schools are made in a timely manner and all children have school places in advance of moving to their new homes.

The EWS also work at a local level with the Steering Committees in the EROCs and Resettlement Committees throughout the country.

With regard to supports for those who wish to participate in third level education, the De-

partment of Education and Skills has advised that the statutory based student grant scheme (the SUSI grant) is the main source of support available for full-time students attending Post Leaving Certificate (PLC), undergraduate and post graduate courses.

Under the terms of the statutory based student grant scheme, grant assistance is awarded to students who meet the prescribed conditions of funding, including those relating to nationality, residency, previous academic attainment and means.

Other supports are available to students however, these can vary depending on the college and course attended. Prospective students should contact the local access office in the relevant institution for details of the various supports available.

### **Child and Family Agency Investigations**

298. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if all private providers of community based residential services operated by or on behalf of Tusla are inspected annually by Tusla registration and inspection services; and if not, the frequency with which such services are inspected. [5012/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The latest figures from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, indicates that, at the end of November 2017, there were 6,182 children in care. Of these, 348 (6%) were in a residential placement, of whom 199 were in a private residential centre run by a private body.

The placement of all children in residential care is governed by the Child Care Regulations 1995. These provide for the welfare of the child, the care practices, care records, accommodation and safety precautions. Under Part VIII of the Child Care Act 1991, non-statutory residential care centres for children are required to be registered by Tusla, on the basis of the standards set out in the Child Care Regulations 1996.

The legislation requires centres to be registered under a three-year registration cycle. Centres are inspected at least twice in each three-year cycle. However, where concerns are identified or where conditions have been attached to the centre's registration, centres will be subject to follow up inspections to assure compliance. Centres are subject to both announced and unannounced inspections.

### **Child and Family Agency Funding**

299. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs further to Parliamentary Question No. 1505 of 16 January 2018 and the answer thereto provided by Tusla, the way in which the more than €7 million in funding provided to the service by Tusla in 2015 and 2016 was spent. [5013/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** As the subject matter of the Deputy's question relates to an operational matter, I have again referred the matter to the attention of Tusla for a direct reply.

### **Affordable Childcare Scheme**

300. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the steps

she is taking to ensure that persons on zero and variable hour contracts are eligible for subsidies under the single affordable child care scheme. [5073/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Affordable Childcare Scheme will provide childcare subsidies for both full-time and part-time childcare. For the universal element of the Scheme, up to 40 hours of support per week will be available, regardless of whether parents are working or not. For the targeted element of the Scheme, the number of hours of childcare subsidised per week will be capped at a maximum of 40 hours for families where both parents (or one parent in the case of a one-parent family) is engaged in work or study, and 15 hours per week for families in which a parent is at home and is not engaged in either work or study.

Parents availing of subsidies under the scheme – whether for part-time or for full-time childcare – will be subsidised on the basis of the amount of childcare used, with the subsidy per hour determined by the age of the child and the family income. Recognising the importance of flexibility to families, arrangements in terms of the numbers of hours per day or days per week of childcare that is used will be a matter for parents to decide, depending on the childcare options available to them locally. The scheme will inform parents of their eligibility and the parents will then provide this information to the childcare provider they have accessed to meet their needs.

The Childcare Support Bill 2017, as published, will give the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs a regulation-making power in relation to the definitions of “work” and “study” for the purposes of the Affordable Childcare Scheme. I intend to prescribe a definition of “work” that is broad and inclusive, recognising the diversity of progression routes towards labour market participation. In particular, as stated in the Heads of Bill and General Scheme published last year, I intend the definition to include people who are required to be available for work even if they do not work regular hours, thus enabling persons on zero and variable hour contracts to benefit from subsidies under the Affordable Childcare Scheme.

The measures put in place last September to make childcare more affordable are currently benefitting the families of more than 66,000 children and will remain in place until the Affordable Childcare Scheme launches.

### **Internal Audits**

301. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her Department has completed an external quality assurance assessment of its internal audit function as required by the Institute of Internal Auditors standards that were introduced in 2012 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5105/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** My Department has an Internal Audit function which is guided by the Institute of Internal Auditors Standards (IIA) which the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform determined should apply across all Departments and other Vote Holders (November 2012). These Standards require that a quality assurance and improvement programme be developed for the Internal Audit function which involves both periodic internal assessments and external assessments being carried out every five years. Guidance provided by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform requires that such an assessment should have been undertaken in 2017.

The Department’s Internal Audit Unit completed an internal (in-house) quality assurance assessment in 2017 following the appointment of a new Head of Internal Audit to the Department

on 31 July 2017. This in-house assessment suggested a number of areas that could be further strengthened to ensure full compliance with the IIA Standards and improve service delivery by the function. My Department was also part of a pilot study by the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) into Internal Audit across a number of Government Departments. The findings relevant to the function issued to the Department on 26 July 2017. The findings showed Internal Audit in the Department was in general compliance with most of the key good practice requirements. These findings were accepted by the Internal Audit function and were responded to the C&AG formally by the Secretary General.

The Unit is currently implementing the recommendations arising from both the in-house and C&AG reviews and plans an external quality assurance assessment later in 2018. The planned external review is included in the Department's Audit Plan for 2018 which was agreed with my Department's Audit Committee and the Secretary General. The timing of this external review will ensure that maximum value is gained from the exercise and aims to ensure that the Unit will operate to best practice, going forward, as well as compliance with the DPER/IIA requirements.

### **Child Care Law Reporting Project**

302. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the latest report of the Child Care Law Reporting Project; her views on its content; the steps she plans to take on foot of it; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5151/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** As the Deputy is aware, the Child Care Law Reporting Project is an independent project authorised under Section 29 of the Child Care Act 1991 (as amended by the Child Care (Amendment) Act 2007), and in accordance with Regulations made under that Section to report on child care proceedings. The project is supported in this work by my Department.

On 29 January the Child Care Law Reporting Project published its final series of reports on child care proceedings, focusing on exceptionally lengthy and complex cases. These cases reveal the challenges that can arise in child care proceedings, including delays in obtaining appropriate Special Care placements and services for young people with severe psychological and psychiatric needs, examples of extremely prolonged care proceedings, and difficulties in accessing appropriate services in cases involving allegations of sexual abuse. The reports also include examples of successful outcomes for children at the centre of care proceedings, including one young man who on returning from specialist services in the United Kingdom at 18 years of age is doing extremely well in a privately funded placement in an adult psychiatric unit.

Overall, the project has provided a measure of the effectiveness of current systems and policies in the areas of child protection and court administration, and assisted in identifying areas where corrective action may be required. Ultimately, it has assisted my Department in gaining a greater depth of knowledge and understanding of child care cases and increasing the evidence base on which future policy formulation can be based.

Within the Special Care resources currently available to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, there are 13 places occupied at present. Recruitment and retention of staff is a priority for Tusla to enable this resource to operate at its full capacity of 26. Tusla is also committed to the implementation of a new model of care across Special Care services. It is anticipated that this model's focus on staff support will make Special Care an attractive employment option, while the model will also assist children and young people and those tasked with caring for them in

managing risk-taking behaviours and preventing the breakdown of step-down placements.

In addition, I am currently conducting a fact-finding exercise on how sexual abuse services are co-ordinated in other jurisdictions. I will work with my colleagues across government, including the Minister for Health and the Minister for Justice and Equality, to develop a model suitable for our country. This will deepen co-operation across health, justice and child protection to improve access to services and to justice, and to minimise the trauma of children who have experienced child sexual abuse.

### **Child and Family Agency Services**

303. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the timeframe for the implementation of a secure, encrypted, online submission facility for Tusla referrals in view of the fact that at present all Tusla referral forms must be printed off and completed manually by the referrer in order to be submitted. [5225/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I am pleased to confirm to the Deputy that Tusla's online portal for the receipt of mandated reports is live. Mandated reporters can go online, via the Tusla website, register, and are then in a position to submit reports directly to Tusla via the portal. I have been assured that data protection issues have been fully addressed, and that Tusla have consulted with the Data Protection Commissioner in relation to fully protecting this sensitive information.

The portal is an efficient and accessible way of ensuring that reports of child abuse can be generated as efficiently as possible, including all the relevant information, and can be sent without delay to Tusla.

### **Child and Family Agency Services**

304. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if her attention has been drawn to the fact that some counties do not have access to an automated case management system and are instead relying on spreadsheets and manual records for the co-ordination and provision of Tusla services in their areas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5226/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Investment in ICT infrastructure is essential as part of the provision of high quality and safe services to vulnerable children and families, and to support both social workers and other staff in their work.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the capital allocation for Tusla this year includes full provision for completion of the roll out of the National Child Care Information System (NCCIS) to all 17 Tusla areas. Tusla has advised that it is on target to complete the roll out of the NCCIS by in mid 2018. At present, the system is live in 8 Tusla areas.

The NCCIS will operate as the central national database supporting the provision of child welfare and protection services and it is a key priority for Tusla.

Access to the NCCIS system will ensure that every social work department has a user-friendly technology solution to record the case history of every child, who is the subject of a child protection or welfare concern, from the point of initial referral to case closure. The system will also have the capacity to facilitate the integration and sharing of information on child protection and welfare cases between Tusla areas where appropriate. Individuals using the

system will be required to have authorised access to ensure access security, data security and client privacy.

### **Child and Family Agency Services**

305. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the timeframe for the implementation of a recommendation by a company (details supplied) concerning the maintenance of all data in regard to a case opened by Tusla in one digital format in view of the fact that the current system of maintaining separate digital and manual case files could lead to the information in the separate files falling out of sync, with implications for the provision of care. [5227/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has advised that the National Child Care Information System (NCCIS) will be rolled out to all Tusla areas by mid-2018. The NCCIS will operate as the central national database supporting the provision of child welfare and protection services. The system will eliminate the reliance on manual records and spreadsheets.

Access to the NCCIS system will ensure that every social work department has a user-friendly technology solution to record the case history of every child, who is the subject of a child protection or welfare concern, from the point of initial referral to case closure. The system will also have the capacity to facilitate the integration and sharing of information on child protection and welfare cases between Tusla areas where appropriate.

### **Child and Family Agency Staff**

306. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of Tusla staff who have been provided with formal training in their rights and obligations under data protection legislation since the establishment of the agency. [5228/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** I have asked Tusla to supply the information requested directly to the Deputy. A copy of Tusla's response will be sent to me.

### **Data Protection**

307. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of the third party organisations contracted by Tusla to provide services that have a formal data processor contract in place with Tusla, as is required by data protection legislation. [5229/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** As the subject matter of the Deputy's question relates to an operational matter, I have referred the matter to the attention of Tusla for a direct reply.

### **Apprenticeship Data**

308. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of persons enrolled in apprenticeships in her Department and State agencies under her remit by

gender in tabular form; and if she will list each such apprenticeship. [5251/18]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** My Department has no persons enrolled in apprenticeships.

### Charities Regulation

309. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if a reply will issue to a query from a person (details supplied) relating to the income threshold for voluntary organisations and charities; his plans to change the limit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5097/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** All organisations registered by the Charities Regulatory Authority are required to provide information to the Regulator on their activities on an annual basis. The financial information required by the Regulator depends on the gross income of the charity and the type of charity.

Current arrangements provide for the submission of information by unincorporated charities with a gross annual income of more than €100,000. An increase in this limit is not proposed at this time.

Full details in relation to annual reporting requirements are available on the Regulator's website at [www.charitiesregulatoryauthority.ie/en/cra/pages/faqs](http://www.charitiesregulatoryauthority.ie/en/cra/pages/faqs)

### Walks Scheme

310. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to have the Hymany Way section from Portumna to Aughrim and from Aughrim to Ballygar included as part of the walk scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5069/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** My Department administers the Walks Scheme which facilitates the development and maintenance of many of Ireland's walking trails. The scheme involves landholders as key participants in the provision of high quality walking trails, by contracting them to undertake maintenance work on sections of National Way Marked Ways and other priority walks that traverse their lands. The landholders receive modest payments for maintenance work undertaken, in line with agreed work plans.

The scheme currently covers 39 trails, with payments made to approximately 1,900 landholders to maintain those trails.

The Programme for a Partnership Government and the Action Plan for Rural Development include a commitment to increase the number of trails covered by the Walks Scheme and my officials are working towards this objective. I intend to initiate a comprehensive review of the scheme's operation this year in order to determine how best to expand the scheme and maximise the impact of the resources available to me. This review will inform any decisions to be made regarding new walks to be included in the scheme.

As significant consultation will be required with both landholders and other stakeholders, it is unlikely that any increase in the number of walks covered by the scheme will be implemented until late 2018 or early 2019.

### **Internal Audits**

311. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if his Department has completed an external quality assurance assessment of its internal audit function as required by the Institute of Internal Audit standards that were introduced in 2012 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5117/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Department of Rural and Community Development which was established in July 2017, is in the process of setting up a range of financial functions.

A new internal audit function is a priority to contribute to the improvement of the organisation's governance, risk management and control procedures using a systematic, disciplined and risk-based approach. When fully operational, the internal audit unit will be bound by charter and by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Internal Audit Standards, to external reviews at least once every five years by a qualified, independent reviewer or review team from outside the organisation. An Audit Committee has already been established by the Department and has an oversight role also.

### **Apprenticeship Data**

312. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of persons enrolled in apprenticeships in his Department and State agencies under his remit by gender in tabular form; and if he will list each such apprenticeship. [5263/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Department of Rural and Community Development was established in July 2017 following the appointment by the Taoiseach of a new Minister with responsibility for Rural and Community Development. Its goal is to facilitate the advancement of sustainable economic and social progress in rural Ireland and to foster sustainable community development throughout Ireland.

The Department has the following agencies under its remit:

- Pobal
- Western Development Commission;
- Charities Regulatory Authority; and
- Irish Water Safety.

I can confirm that the Department, and its agencies, currently have no persons enrolled in apprenticeships.

### **Dog Breeding Industry**

313. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the way in which is it possible for an unregistered dog breeding enterprise (details supplied) to operate without planning permission unimpeded by either his Department or the local authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5286/18]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** Under the

Dog Breeding Establishment Act 2010, dog breeding establishments are required to register with the relevant local authority.

I have no function in relation to the registration of individual establishments, as this is a matter for local authorities. However, enquiries have been made regarding the enterprise referenced in the Deputy's question. The relevant local authority has indicated that while the enterprise is a commercial website for the online sale of dogs, the associated premises is registered with the local authority as a dog breeding establishment.

Planning permission is a matter for the relevant planning authority or An Bord Pleanála and I have no function in this matter.

### **Civil Registration Service**

314. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to amend the Civil Registration Act 2004 to enable notaries public to solemnise marriages in civil wedding ceremonies for persons who do not wish to carry out a humanist or religious ceremony on the weekends; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [4999/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The legal basis for the appointment of marriage solemnisers in Ireland may be found in Part 6 of the Civil Registration Act 2004, as amended.

Section 54 of that Act provides for the categories of bodies and organisations which may apply for registration of persons on the Register of Solemnisers maintained by an t-Árd Chláraitheoir (Registrar General).

These are:

- The Health Service Executive for the registration of a registrar employed by the Executive,
- A religious body (as defined) for the registration of a member of that body, and
- A secular body (as defined) for the registration of a member of that body.

There are currently no plans to amend the legislative provisions in relation to the appointment of marriage solemnisers.

### **Working Family Payment Data**

315. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of Army personnel who received family income supplement in 2017 and to date in 2018. [4991/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Working Family Payment (WFP) formerly Family Income Supplement (FIS) is an in-work support, which provides an income top-up for employees on low earnings with children. WFP is designed to prevent in-work poverty for low paid workers with child dependants and to offer a financial incentive to take-up employment. There are over 57,000 families with more than 129,000 children in receipt of WFP.

To qualify for WFP, a person must be engaged in full-time insurable employment, which is expected to last for at least 3 months and be working for a minimum of 38 hours per fortnight or

19 hours per week. A couple may combine their hours of employment to meet the qualification criteria. The applicant must also have at least one qualified child who normally resides with them or is supported by them. Furthermore, the average family income must be below a specified amount, which varies according to the number of qualified children in the family.

The figures for Defence Forces families in receipt of WFP are as follows:

Year	Number of Recipients
2017	180
2018	175*

\*As at the end of January 2018

For the purposes of consistency it is important to note that the figures for 2017 above are based on the amount of families in receipt of WFP at week 52 of that year, as such the figures may go up or down depending on the week in the year.

### Working Family Payment Data

316. **Deputy Pat Buckley** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of Garda personnel who received family income supplement in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018. [4993/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Please see below the number of Garda personnel that received Working Family payment (WFP), formerly known as Family Income Supplement (FIS) in each of the years 2013 to 2017 and to date in 2018.

#### WFP Garda Recipients

2013	2014	2015	2016	2017*	2018
20	24	23	27	24	25

\*denotes up to 31 January 2018

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Housing Assistance Payment Administration

317. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if rent supplement will continue to be paid to those persons whose landlords refuse to enter the housing assistance payment scheme. [5002/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Rent supplement plays a vital role in housing families and individuals, with the scheme supporting approximately 34,400 recipients for which the Government has provided €180 million for in 2018.

The Deputy will be aware that the strategic policy direction of the Department is to return rent supplement to its original purpose of being a short-term income support with the introduction of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, available nationwide from 1 March 2017. There are currently over 32,000 active HAP tenancy arrangements of which almost 9,000 are direct transfers from rent supplement.

All new applicants with housing needs assessments must present to the local authorities for HAP rather than rent supplement. People in receipt of rent supplement for over 18 months are being requested to contact their local authority to have their housing needs assessed, thus beginning the transfer process to HAP. The target is to complete all transfers from long term rent supplement to HAP in 2020. Failure of a landlord to participate in HAP does not affect an existing recipient's continued entitlement to rent supplement.

I can assure the Deputy that officials in my Department make every effort to ensure that persons in receipt of rent supplement are supported in the transfer to HAP. Communication with landlords in respect of the HAP scheme is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Maternity Leave**

318. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if during maternity leave, there are protections for self-employed women; and the mechanisms in place for them to make earnings during this period. [5006/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Department of Justice and Equality has responsibility for maternity leave which is provided for in the 1994 and 2004 Maternity Protection Acts (as amended). The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has responsibility for the associated social welfare payment of maternity benefit as provided for in the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (as amended).

Maternity benefit is a payment made for 26 weeks to employed and self-employed pregnant women who satisfy certain PRSI contribution conditions on their own insurance record. Payment is made for a period beginning not later than 2 weeks before the end of the expected week of confinement. The original scheme was introduced in 1970 and was extended to include self-employed women with effect from June 1997.

As the scheme is intended to provide income support to women who are on leave, from their employment or self-employment, pre and post-delivery of their baby, regulations provide that a woman shall be disqualified from receiving maternity benefit for a period during which she engages in any form of insurable employment or insurable self-employment.

Maternity leave arrangements for employees are governed by the Maternity Protection Acts 1994 and 2004 (as amended). In applying for maternity benefit, employees must have their maternity leave certified by their employer. Self-employed women certify their own leave for the purposes of the scheme and they can return to work whenever they chose.

This year it is estimated that there will be a weekly average of 20,000 recipients of maternity benefit at a cost of €264 million.

### **JobPath Programme**

319. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on issues raised by a person (details supplied) regarding JobPath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5023/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The

core issue raised by the Deputy's correspondent relates to my Department's activation services and the Personal Progression Plan. The Deputy will be aware the primary goal of my Department's activation and employment services is to move people from full or part time unemployment to full-time, sustainable employment. The Social Welfare (Consolidated) Act 2005, as amended, specifies that participation in activation meetings is mandatory and this obligation applies irrespective of whether the service is provided by my Department's own case officers or those advisors employed by external contractors such as the Local Employment Services or the JobPath Service.

Participants with the JobPath service are not required to sign a contract with the JobPath companies but they are, in the same manner as all customers referred to any of the other Department's activation services, requested to agree and sign a personal progression plan (PPP). The PPP is a joint agreement between the customer and their personal advisor and is an integral part of the activation process. The PPP includes an agreed schedule of job-focused activities, actions and targets, personalised to take account of the person's specific qualifications and employment preferences. The contents of the PPP may change during the person's engagement with the service as they develop new skills or experience which may broaden their employment preferences.

Failure to engage with the activation service as required may result in the jobseeker's payment being reduced or temporarily suspended, the process for sanctioning clients who do not engage with the JobPath activation process is exactly the same as the process for clients who fail to engage with the Department's other activation services provided by Intreo Centres, Local Employment Services and Job Clubs.

It is important to say that all decisions regarding a person's welfare entitlements while on JobPath are taken only by officials of my Department and not by the JobPath providers and my Department will investigate any specific complaint raised by a participant with the service.

My department, in January of this year, published a cohort performance report (available on *welfare.ie*) for the service, which showed that of the jobseekers who commenced with the service (in the four cohorts between July 2015 and June 2016) that 25% had obtained employment: 18% full-time, 4% part-time and 3% self-employed.

The overall response of participants with JobPath to date has also been very positive. My Department published the results of an independent customer satisfaction survey which indicated that between 76% and 81% of customers were satisfied with the service provided and between 5% and 8% expressed dissatisfaction.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

### **State Pension (Contributory)**

320. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the fact that under the proposed total contributions approach to pensions, persons who retire after 2020 will face cuts of up to 44% in their pensions relative to current rates such as in examples (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5045/18]

321. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she is satisfied that the plan to substantially raise the bar of qualification for a full State contributory pension is a fair and equitable approach for persons retiring after 2020 with reference to the total contribution approach. [5046/18]

322. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the effect that gaps in work years other than those spent caring or unemployed will have on pension entitlements when a total contributions approach to pensions is introduced. [5047/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 320 to 322, inclusive, together.

On the 23 January, the Government agreed to a proposal that will allow pensioners affected by the 2012 changes in rate bands to have their pension entitlement calculated by a new “Total Contributions Approach” (TCA) which will include up to 20 years of a new HomeCaring credit. Unlike the current Homemakers scheme, this credit will apply to periods both before and after 1994. This approach is expected to significantly benefit many people, particularly women, whose work history includes an extended period of time outside the paid workplace, while raising families or in a caring role. It will make it easier for such pensioners to qualify for a higher rate of the State Pension (contributory). The TCA will ensure that the totality of a person’s social insurance contributions - as opposed to the timing of them - determines a final pension outcome, and it also acknowledges, for the first time, the contribution made by homecarers in the period before 1994.

The Government is making this TCA option available to people earlier than planned to deal with the anomaly that has existed in the yearly averaging approach since its introduction in 1961, i.e., that two people with the same number of contributions could get paid different pensions because of differences in the length of time over which those contributions were made.

Those who are less likely to benefit from this TCA model are people with lower numbers of paid social insurance contributions, who have no significant homemaking/caring periods. However, it should be understood that no current pensioner will have a reduced rate of payment as a result of this announcement. Anyone who is not better off as a result of this proposal will remain on their existing rate of payment.

The TCA model of pensions calculation was first announced in the National Pensions Framework in 2010, as was the proposal to assess all new pensioners under this approach from around 2020. Officials in my Department have been working on the introduction of a TCA since 2015. The recent Actuarial Review of the Social Insurance Fund has been used to explore the costs of various options and to inform the design of the Total Contributions Approach. This Review was recently completed and published. The Department is now considering the costings produced. Later this year, it will publish a paper on the full TCA model to be introduced from around 2020 onwards. It will then engage in a public consultation on it. This consultation will be a key input to the design of the final structure of the TCA model, which will include the number of years required for a maximum rate of pension, and the treatment of credited contributions and homemaking periods, to be submitted to Government later this year. Subsequent to this, legislation will be introduced to the Oireachtas.

Therefore, it is not possible to extrapolate what a person’s pension may be subsequent to the introduction of the full TCA on the basis of the measures announced by the Government on 23 January 2018. Whether someone reaching pension age in 2020 or beyond will receive a higher or lower pension under the full TCA model will depend on a number of factors, including the final design of the scheme, and their own circumstances. The Deputy refers to “gaps in work years other than those spent caring or unemployed”, and these will include people who were in receipt of other payments such as Jobseekers or Illness Benefit, which also may attract credited contributions. People who were in receipt of an Invalidity Pension, or a Widows Contributory Pension, at the time they reach State pension age will generally receive a contributory pension at the maximum rate.

It should be noted that the examples the Deputy gives, e.g. where someone worked only 10 years, and have no other credited contributions (e.g. from periods on jobseekers benefit), nor home-caring periods (pre-1994 or post-1994), and yet are dependent upon the Irish State pension are highly unrepresentative of those on lower rate bands. Reckonable PRSI contributions can be awarded from ages 16 to 65 inclusive, or 50 full years. Most adults would have been engaged in some activity for most of that time that either attracted PRSI coverage, or which will attract HomeCaring Credits. Very few would have been resident all that time, but would have 40 years where they were neither covered for PRSI nor engaged in home caring.

People who spent time working abroad might be expected to have entitlements from their time spent in those countries, which may be co-ordinated under EU regulations or bilateral agreements, which can result in a more advantageous outcome for that pensioner. For example, the TCA will not benefit someone who arrives in Ireland in their early 50s, who can currently receive a full Irish pension for 10 years work, despite having significant additional pension entitlements accrued in another country over the previous 30 years. As in most countries, such Irish contributions will attract a partial contributory pension, proportionate to their contributions, and they will cease attracting higher pensions than those who may have contributed far more into the system. However, most will have significant contributions in another country which will attract a second pension from there,

While it is true that time spent in full-time education may result in several years when they did not pay into the Social Insurance Fund, a person has 50 years to build up their contributions record, and few if any people will study so many years, without part-time work attracting PRSI, that they will be unable to work up at least 40 years contributions.

People who have a lower State pension (contributory) entitlement can apply for and may qualify for a higher State pension (non-contributory) of up to 95% of the maximum contributory rate. This is a means-tested payment, but over 70% qualify at the maximum rate due to generous income disregards. If someone spent most of their working life not in employment and in receipt of social welfare payments, this will generally mean their income will increase by over €40 per week upon reaching State pension age.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Córas Iompair Éireann**

323. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to problems with the *Córas Iompair Éireann*, CIÉ, pension schemes; and the steps she will take to address the issues which relates to the pensions of nearly 10,000 members. [5054/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** *Córas Iompair Éireann* (CIÉ) is a State body under the aegis of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. Therefore, I am not in a position to comment on the matter raised by the Deputy.

Accordingly, queries in respect of this matter should be referred to the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport for a reply to the issues he has raised.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **State Pension (Contributory)**

324. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the pension entitlements of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; the entitlement of the person; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5071/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The person concerned is currently in receipt of a reduced rate widow(er)/survivor's contributory pension, with effect from 17 July 1979, based on their own insurance record.

The person's entitlement to state pension (contributory) was examined on 10 February 2017. According to the records of my Department, the person concerned has a social insurance record of 1,637 reckonable contributions and credits, based on an assessed yearly average of 33 contributions, covering their working life from date of entry into insurable employment in July 1969 to end 2016. The person concerned has no recorded contributions for the tax years 1978/79 to 1987/88 inclusive or 1989/90 to 1992/93 and has a number of partially complete years. This affects their overall yearly average and, consequently, their rate of weekly pension entitlement. The person was notified of their state pension (contributory) entitlement on 10 February 2017 and informed that they were better off to remain on their existing payment which would become payable at the increased 'over age 66' rate with effect from their 66th birthday. Attached to that letter was a copy of their contribution record, as held by my Department upon which their entitlement was calculated.

Additional information regarding unrecorded contributions has since been provided by the person concerned and their state pension (contributory) entitlement is being re-examined. On completion, the outcome of that review will be notified to the person concerned without delay. Any change to the person's insurance record based on the additional information provided will not affect the person's existing rate of entitlement, as social insurance paid after the death of their spouse is not reckonable for widow(er)/survivor's pension purposes.

The Deputy will be aware that the Government recently announced proposals that pensioners who qualified for state pension (contributory) since September 2012, and whose rate of entitlement was impacted by the 2012 rate band changes, may apply for a review to have their entitlement considered under a new Total Contribution Approach (TCA). It will take some time to draft and pass the necessary legislation, and then develop the systems and procedures necessary to administer the new pension entitlement option. Accordingly, it is not necessary for any person to contact the Department about their situation. Instead, the Department expects to start issuing invitations to these pensioners from Quarter 4 2018 to apply for a review under the new pension eligibility arrangements, and to notify any periods spent caring for which HomeCaring credits may be due. Review applicants will be notified of the outcome of their review and any applicable higher rate of entitlement will be paid to them. Such payments are expected to commence from Q1 2019. Where an increase is awarded, it will be backdated to 30 March 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Social Insurance Payments**

325. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on a matter (details supplied) regarding PRSI contributions; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5083/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The person referred to by the Deputy was a public servant. Under social welfare legislation any additional employment undertaken by an individual employed in the public or civil service and

who pays the modified rate of PRSI is specified as being subsidiary employment only and not as the principal means of livelihood.

The social insurance record for this individual shows a full record of contributions paid at the modified rate during the period in question.

Therefore, the additional employment undertaken in this case is considered to be subsidiary in nature and the correct class of PRSI is class J. Such employment is insurable for occupational injury benefit only.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Applications**

326. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made in respect of a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in making a decision on this application; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5084/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I confirm that an application from this lady for disability allowance (DA) was received by the Department on 19 October 2017.

The processing time for individual disability allowance claims may vary in accordance with their relative complexity in terms of the three main qualifying criteria, the person's circumstances and the information they provide in support of their claim.

The application has been referred to a Social Welfare Inspector (SWI) for a report on the person's means and circumstances. Once the SWI has submitted his/her report to DA section, a decision will be made on the application and this lady will be notified directly of the outcome.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Invalidity Pension Applications**

327. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an invalidity pension will be approved in the case of a person (details supplied). [5086/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** Invalidity pension (IP) is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions.

The department received a claim for IP for the gentleman concerned on 1 December 2017. The Deciding Officer is satisfied that the medical conditions for the scheme are satisfied. The gentleman in question has recently claimed an increase for a qualified adult (IQA) and eligibility for the IQA and an increase for a qualified child (IQC) is being assessed. His IP claim will be finalised as quickly as possible and he will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

## **Córas Iompair Éireann**

328. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her attention has been drawn to the fact that Córas Iompair Éireann submitted severely flawed funding submissions to the Pensions Authority that do not fully reflect the reality of the situation with the current and future funding of the defined benefit pensions of up to 10,000 members of the CIÉ pension scheme. [5093/18]

329. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to investigate if the election process to the CIÉ pension fund management committee was in compliance with regulations. [5095/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 328 and 329 together.

Scheme trustees have duties and responsibilities under trust law, under other relevant legislation and under the Pensions Act, 1990, as amended. The duties of pension scheme trustees include administering the trust in accordance with the law and the terms of the trust deed and rules. Consequently any decisions made by corporate or individual trustees of an occupational pension scheme are governed by the relevant legislation. The provisions of the Pensions Act are enforced through the supervision of the Pensions Authority.

Although the Pensions Authority is under the aegis of my Department, it regulates pension schemes entirely independently of my Department. Therefore, I am not in a position to comment on the matters raised by the Deputy.

If scheme members or Deputies have concerns about the CIÉ pension scheme they should address queries directly to the Pensions Authority.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Internal Audits**

330. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if her Department has completed an external quality assurance assessment of its internal audit function as required by the Institute of Internal Auditors standards that were introduced in 2012 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5110/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** In accordance with the standards of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Standards & Ethics of the Institute of Internal Auditors, an external quality assurance assessment of the Internal Audit function of my Department was successfully completed in December 2015.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Benefit Applications**

331. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the waiting time to process a carer's benefit application; and if she is satisfied with the level of staffing in the carer's benefit department. [5119/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are made as quickly as possible.

Before a decision can be made on entitlement to carer's benefit (CARB), evidence must be provided in respect of the care recipient's care requirement, the level of care the carer provides, the carer's hours of employment and their PRSI record. In general, social welfare schemes with a number of complex qualifying conditions can take longer to process. This is compounded if the documentary evidence provided at initial application stage is incomplete or insufficient; this is often the case with CARB applications.

The average processing times for CARB applications has improved in the latter half of 2017. At the end of December 2017, the average waiting time for new CARB applications was 10 weeks with 615 CARB applications awaiting decision. The staffing needs of the area are regularly reviewed, having regard to workloads and the competing demands arising, to ensure that the best use is made of all available resources.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Money Advice and Budgeting Service**

332. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on the latest developments regarding the restructuring of the existing 51 local MABS companies into eight regional companies by the Citizens Information Board, CIB, in view of the recommendation by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Social Protection and Dáil Éireann against the restructuring; if her attention has been drawn to the representative deficit in place now that CIB does not recognise MABS NMF as the representative body for MABS boards; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5120/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Citizens Information Board (CIB) is a statutory body established by the Oireachtas. In addition to its own statutory responsibilities in relation to information and advocacy service provision, it has statutory responsibility for the countrywide networks of Citizens Information Services (CIS) and the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS).

In February 2017, the Board of CIB decided to change its governance arrangements from ninety three individual service delivery companies to an eight region model. The new model will comprise sixteen new regional companies, with one CIS and one MABS company in each of the eight regions.

The governance structure is a matter for the Board of CIB. The Board is clear that this change is necessary so that CIB, and the delivery services it funds, adequately meet the requirements of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies and the compliance requirements of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, given the significant level of taxpayers money involved. CIB has been allocated €57.410 million to fund its activities and that of its service delivery partners for 2018.

The changes are being made at local company board level only. The valuable work carried out by employees and volunteers working in CIS services and employees of MABS services will continue as heretofore. The staff and boards throughout the CIS and MABS networks have been assured by CIB that there will be no change to the terms and conditions of staff, no diminution of service and no closure of service delivery points.

Following a request by the Joint Oireachtas Committee (JOC) on Employment Affairs and Social Protection, CIB's Executive commissioned a Cost Benefit Analysis on the new regional, sixteen company board model. The Report, which is published on CIB's website, was provided to the JOC on 21st September 2017 and indicates strong support for the decision of the Board to proceed to implement the new governance arrangements.

It is the stated intention of CIB to continue to provide information and support throughout the transitional period. As the restructuring process progresses, all CIS and MABS services will be requested to commence gathering the information required to facilitate what is known as the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employees) (TUPE) process for employees and the transfer of business assets/liabilities. In this regard, information sessions have been organised for Chairpersons of local services, providing opportunities for Chairpersons to seek clarifications on the process of transfer to the new regional companies and wind up of the existing companies.

MABS National Management Forum (NMF) was established as a representative body for the 51 local MABS management companies. It represents the interests of the boards of local MABS companies, as employers. MABS NMF has not recognised the union of MABS staff and there are no agreed collective bargaining arrangements in place.

Individual MABS companies engaging with the TUPE process are and will continue to be supported by CIB. On establishment, CIB will support the eight new MABS regional companies to promptly put in place an Employer/Union Forum.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Pension Provisions**

333. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the entitlements of State contributory pension recipients who were self-employed and in receipt of farm assist payments prior to 2007 will be reviewed; the estimated cost of granting a credit to those self-employed farm assist recipients who were not permitted to make PRSI class S contributions prior to 2007 to ensure low-income farmers in receipt can avail of full pension entitlements; the number of persons this PRSI issue relates to; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5171/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The farm assist scheme was introduced in 1999 to provide income support for low income farmers. It replaced the former smallholders' unemployment assistance payment. In line with the then existing arrangements for unemployment assistance (including smallholders) and pre-retirement allowance, the income of farm assist recipients was exempt from class S PRSI for self-employed workers. Recipients of farm assist who had previously paid class S social insurance had the option of paying voluntary contributions to maintain their social insurance record, including their entitlement to State pension contributory, provided they satisfied the qualifying conditions.

Since 1st January 2007, the exemption from class S PRSI has been removed and those receiving jobseeker's allowance and farm assist are subject to class S PRSI as self-employed contributors on their self-employed income, provided their annual income is €5,000 or more.

Currently PRSI credited contributions (credits) are only awarded to former employees, to cover gaps in social insurance where they are not in a position to pay PRSI such as during periods of unemployment, illness, etc. Self-employed workers do not qualify for credits.

In the absence of exact numbers of farm assistant recipients with annual income in excess of the income threshold for paying class S PRSI prior to 2007 (i.e. €3,174 pa), it is not possible to estimate the numbers of persons affected. Determining the cost to the Social Insurance Fund of awarding credits to the self-employed when calculating pension entitlement would require consideration of a number of factors including the age of the individual, the number of credits awarded and other social insurance contributions paid by that individual, and it is similarly not possible to estimate.

### **Pension Provisions**

334. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a full review of pension entitlements will be arranged for a person (details supplied) in respect of whom details of previous employment were supplied some time ago with regard to the determination of the person's entitlement to a higher rate of contributory old age pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5187/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The person concerned is in receipt of a reduced rate state pension (contributory) with effect from their 66th birthday, based on an assessed yearly average of 19 contributions, covering their working life from 1962 to 2010. According to the records of my Department, the person concerned has a social insurance record of 919 reckonable contributions and credits, and is in receipt of the correct rate of contributory pension based on this social insurance record.

The person has no recorded contributions for the tax years 1969 to 1997/8 inclusive, and has fewer than the full rate of 52 contributions for a number of years during their contribution history. This affects their overall yearly average and, consequently, their rate of weekly pension entitlement.

The person was notified in writing of their pension award on 3 May 2011. Attached to that letter was a copy of their contribution record, as held by my Department and upon which their pension entitlement was calculated. The person has been requested on a number of occasions to provide details of any unrecorded periods of employment or self employment. No response has been received to date.

If the person concerned considers that they hold additional information which may impact on their pension eligibility, they should submit the details without delay to enable my Department to have the matter investigated.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Household Benefits Scheme**

335. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the steps she is taking to ensure that more companies other than just a company (details supplied) are allowed to deduct the free electricity allowance from their customers' bills; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5230/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The electricity allowance is still given to customers as a monthly monetary credit on a customer's electricity bill where they have a domestic account with Electric Ireland. This dates back to a time when its predecessor (ESB) was the only electricity supplier available.

My Department has been approached by some of the other electricity providers regarding the possibility of crediting the electricity allowance onto their customer's bills, similar to Electric Ireland arrangement. However, providing the necessary secure ICT systems would prove costly both for each of the suppliers and the Department. Maintaining computerised links and accounts with the many companies now operating in the energy market would also place a substantial administrative burden on the Department.

Customers who want to purchase their electricity needs from other providers are given a cash payment. This allows them to easily switch to a company which best meets their individual electricity needs, giving them value for money. They can also draw down any remaining credit balance when switching provider. There are currently in excess of 123,000 customers on these cash payment arrangements.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Social Welfare Benefits Data

336. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of recipients of family income support by county in each of the years 2011 to 2017 in tabular form. [5245/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Working Family Payment (WFP) Section was unable to provide the data requested for year 2011. WFP Section informed the Deputy's constituency office in advance of answering this Parliamentary Question (PQ) and it was confirmed the Deputy accepted the revised data figures.

Working Family Payment (WFP) formerly known as Family Income Supplement (FIS) is a weekly tax-free payment for employees on low earnings with children. This payment effectively preserves the incentive to take up or remain in employment in circumstances where the employee might only be marginally better off than if s/he were claiming other social welfare payments. WFP provides an important policy instrument in reducing child poverty in working households as well as improving incentives to work. There has been a steady growth both in the number of families supported by WFP over recent years and associated expenditure with numbers in receipt of WFP rising from 26,000 families with 56,000 children in 2009 to 57,745 families and 129,274 children by the end of 2017.

Increased awareness of WFP as a consequence of the Department's information strategy for the scheme and significant improvements in customer service and processing times for WFP customers have contributed to the increased numbers.

The number of FIS recipients by county from 2012 - 2017 is as follows:

#### FIS Recipients

County	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Antrim	1	1	1	1	1	1
Armagh	4	11	14	16	15	16
Carlow	584	744	859	920	984	991
Cavan	710	965	1,153	1,234	1,267	1,292
Clare	763	1,028	1,181	1,280	1,313	1,278
Cork	3,372	4,683	5,354	6,039	6,110	6,017

County	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Derry	7	14	13	23	20	20
Donegal	1,564	2,048	2,307	2,511	2,676	2,857
Down	29	40	42	40	35	43
Dublin	7,397	10,281	11,917	13,351	13,569	13,509
Fermanagh	23	35	29	30	28	27
Galway	1,535	2,090	2,357	2,675	2,761	2,654
Kerry	972	1,326	1,433	1,592	1,717	1,734
Kildare	1,356	1,873	2,205	2,386	2,388	2,443
Kilkenny	514	696	798	899	980	1,014
Laois	557	766	870	967	1,046	1,093
Leitrim	214	291	339	395	383	402
Limerick	1,377	1,889	2,095	2,350	2,463	2,496
Longford	446	604	666	721	801	795
Louth	1,159	1,647	1,872	2,084	2,193	2,191
Mayo	992	1,366	1,486	1,568	1,626	1,573
Meath	1,191	1,725	2,044	2,285	2,311	2,264
Monaghan	631	842	956	1,073	1,132	1,127
Offaly	637	868	935	1,049	1,085	1,118
Roscom- mon	480	609	665	723	708	752
Sligo	479	594	674	748	761	767
Tipperary	1,353	1,785	1,969	2,175	2,171	2,176
Tyrone	11	17	16	15	14	16
Waterford	1,011	1,409	1,641	1,810	1,828	1,872
Westmeath	766	983	1,094	1,224	1,247	1,312
Wexford	1,395	1,851	2,029	2,273	2,447	2,417
Wicklow	770	1,073	1,282	1,442	1,478	1,468

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### Apprenticeship Data

337. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons enrolled in apprenticeships in her Department and State agencies under her remit by gender in tabular form; and if she will list each such apprenticeship. [5256/18]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The issue raised is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Education and Skills. I understand that his Department will be replying back to the Deputy directly.

### Fire Service Staff

338. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding the mandatory retirement age for firefighters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5032/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):**

International research indicates that the retirement age of 55 is the optimum age to ensure that fire-fighters are capable of satisfactorily performing the tasks expected of them. The retirement age of 55 years of age was introduced because of health and safety considerations related to the job. Since the enactment of the Health, Safety and Welfare at Work Act 1989, underpinned by subsequent legislation, each fire authority, as an employer, has a statutory duty to avoid placing employees at risk.

A full time firefighter is statutorily required to retire at age 55 under the Public Service Superannuation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2004. This retirement age is set at 55 due to the physically demanding nature of the fire-fighter role.

The retirement age for retained fire fighters is 55 with an extended period to age 58 subject to a formal application process including a compulsory medical assessment.

A collective agreement was reached between the Local Government Management Services Board and the trade unions involved (SIPTU and ATGWU) in November 2002. This collective agreement provided, inter alia, for the appointment of an Expert Group which in turn would advise as to the retirement age for retained firefighters. The Expert Group's Report on Retirement Age recommended that the retirement age for retained firefighters remain at 55, with provision for an annual extension, subject to medical assessment, up to 58 years of age. Following the report of the Expert Group published in April 2003, a circular was issued by my Department in November 2003 setting out the age requirements in relation to retained firefighters in line with the Expert Report.

In general, any changes proposed by either management or unions are negotiated using the established Industrial Relations processes. In this regard, the matter of increasing the retirement age for firefighters was included as part of recent discussions on a wide range of issues at the Workplace Relations Commission, between the Local Government Management Agency (representing the employers) and SIPTU.

I understand that these discussions are at a preliminary stage and therefore I am unable to give an indication as to when these discussions will be completed or the likely outcome.

### **Mortgage Lending**

339. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the position regarding the application of the Central Bank's loan-to-income rules in the new Rebuilding Ireland home loan scheme for first-time buyers announced recently. [5237/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):**

Local authorities have an exemption from retail credit firm status under the Markets in Financial Instruments and Miscellaneous Provision Act 2007 as local authorities provide housing finance for public purposes and at a rate more favourable than that available commercially. Therefore, the Central Bank's macro prudential lending regulations do not apply to local authority mortgage lending.

The purpose of the fixed rate Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is to deliver affordability and sustainability through certainty of repayments. The new mortgage arrangements regularise local authority lending with the prudent and cautious lending rules of the Central Bank. Borrowers are required to have a 10% deposit; evidence of savings; and must be capable of repaying the mortgage in accordance with a robust credit policy.

The unique aspect of this new mortgage offering is the fixed interest rate over the full lifetime of the borrowing. This means that risks normally associated with interest rate changes are eliminated. Borrowers therefore have absolute certainty of their repayments for terms of up to 25 or 30 years. Moreover, the local authority as lender has much more certainty of the borrowers' capacity to repay the debt over the lifetime of the loan.

The long term fixed rate offering obviates the need for stress testing as the repayments are fixed for the life of the loan. Rather than a Loan to Income (LTI) limit, a maximum permissible Net Disposable Income (NDI) ratio of 35% is used which more accurately reflects the benefit of the low fixed rate available for the full life of the loan.

The credit and income assessments which underpin the loan are firmly based on a borrower's capacity to repay the loan. Likewise, the assessments take account of borrowers' outgoings and household commitments. Together with the certainty of the amount that a mortgage repayment will be over the entire term of the mortgage, this means that borrowers are in a much more secure position than would be the case in a variable rate position, or if assessment was singularly linked to a multiple of income. They can also take comfort from the position that they are making monthly (affordable) repayments on the capital element of their mortgage – increasing their equity stake in their home.

### **Local Authority Assets**

340. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he has engaged with Dublin City Council regarding the best use of the lands at a location (details supplied). [4987/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I understand that site is under the control of Dublin City Council and as such its development or disposal is a matter, in the first instance, for the Council, including its elected members.

In this regard, I understand that Dublin City Council is considering disposal of this site, by way of a development agreement, to support the transformation of the area. In carrying out its examination of the best use of the site, the Council is taking into account the views of the local community and the sensitivities associated with the site in question. Any such plans will, of course, be subject to the Council's elected members' agreement.

### **Home Loan Scheme**

341. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of funding being made available to Donegal County Council for the home loan scheme; the estimated number of persons that will qualify in County Donegal for the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5005/18]

**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 from today, 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 Housing Finance Agency (HFA) has raised €200 million from a variety of sources 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 is not allocated to individual local authorities but rather will be drawn down by local authorities from the HFA to match-fund their lending, on a first come first served basis under the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan. Further tranches of loan finance will be secured by the HFA, as necessary. It is not possible to estimate the number of fixed rate loan applications per local authority under this loan.

### **Irish Water Administration**

342. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the legislation or regulation needed to make Irish Water accountable to the Comptroller and Auditor General will be put in place. [5081/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I am positively disposed to considering an appropriate role for the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) in relation to Irish Water. A review of the issues involved is currently underway. I hope to report shortly on an appropriate role for the C&AG with respect to Irish Water. That report will outline the next steps with respect to any amending legislation that may be required.

### **Internal Audits**

343. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department has completed an external quality assurance assessment of its internal audit function as required by the Institute of Internal Audit standards that were introduced in 2012 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5114/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department has an Internal Audit function which is guided by the Institute of Internal Auditors' Standards which the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform determined, in November 2012, should apply across all Departments and other Vote Holders. These Standards require that a quality assurance and improvement programme be developed for the function which involves both periodic internal assessments and external assessments being carried out every five years.

Guidance provided by the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform on meeting this particular requirement suggested that these assessments be undertaken in 2017. My Department's Internal Audit Unit, accordingly, completed an internal quality assurance assessment last year which concluded that it was operating in general conformance with the Standards. The assessment also suggested certain actions that could further strengthen compliance with the Standards and service delivery generally. The Unit is currently implementing these recommendations and plans to undertake an external quality assurance assessment later this year when the lessons learned from the internal assessment have been applied. This approach, which has been agreed with my Department's Audit Committee, will ensure that optimal value is gained from the external review and that the Unit is positioned to continue to provide its invaluable service

to the highest possible standards.

### **Fire Stations Provision**

344. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when funding will be provided to Monaghan County Council for the provision of a new fire station in Ballybay, County Monaghan. [5144/18]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** The provision of fire services in local authority areas, including the establishment and maintenance of fire brigades, the assessment of fire cover needs and the provision of premises, is a statutory function of the individual fire authorities under the provisions of the Fire Services Act, 1981. My Department supports the fire authorities through setting general policy, providing a central training programme, issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding for priority infrastructural projects.

In February 2016, my Department announced a five-year Fire Services Capital Programme with an allocation of €40 million, based on an annual €8 million allocation, to be used for the purchase of fire appliances and specialist equipment, building or upgrading of prioritised Fire Stations, an upgrade of the Communications and Mobilisation system and improvements to Training Centres.

Monaghan County Council has prioritised a new fire station project in Castleblayney and this is included as part of this programme under the list of priority projects to be progressed for 2019. A revised cost plan for this project is currently under consideration in my Department.

Ballybay is also included under the 2016 – 2020 Capital Programme as a new build station project to be included in annual reviews. Approval-in-principle issued in 2008 for a new fire station at Corrybrennan, Ballybay to a maximum cost of €1,000,000. In April 2009, design and cost plans were received in my Department indicating a total cost of € 1.2 million. The Council was recouped €17,000 for professional fees in 2012 and €100,000 site acquisition costs in 2016.

Correspondence was received by my Department in July 2017 indicating that the Council wishes to proceed with this project. A revised cost plan has been requested from Monaghan County Council and on receipt of this my Department will continue working with the local authority to progress this project.

### **Credit Union Services**

345. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the timeframe for the establishment of a new financial vehicle to allow credit unions invest in the provision of social housing; the stage the process is at; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5145/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department and the Department of Finance have met with Credit Union representative bodies on a number of occasions to examine how their sector can assist in the area of financing social housing delivery.

The Central Bank is currently finalising their Consultation on Potential Changes for the Investment Framework for Credit Unions. Once this has been finalised and, if approved, the potential changes could allow for investment by credit unions in the delivery of social housing,

having regard also to the potential implications of a decision expected from Eurostat in relation to the classification of Approved Housing Bodies for Government accounting purposes.

Conscious of the independence of the Central Bank in its regulatory role in respect of credit unions, bilateral engagement has taken place between both Departments to consider the potential regulatory and legislative implications of credit union involvement in the social housing sector.

Both Departments have also met with the Central Bank to provide information of a technical nature in relation to social housing funding arrangements. This was with a view to assisting the Central Bank in understanding how these arrangements operate, as it deals with issues arising from proposals put forward for credit union investment in social housing.

### **Approved Housing Bodies**

346. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the re-classification of approved housing bodies as part of general government expenditure; the impact on the calculation of fiscal space; the timeframe for such calculations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5146/18]

347. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to review schemes (details supplied) in view of the EUROSTAT reclassification of approved housing bodies expenditure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5147/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 346 and 347 together.

As part of a review commissioned by Eurostat, the EU Statistical Office, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) were asked in October 2016 to review the classification of Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) for Government accounting purposes.

The classification was last reviewed in 2014, with a recommendation from the CSO to Eurostat at the time that these Bodies would remain outside of the General Government Sector. This recommendation was accepted by Eurostat, with a proviso that the decision could be reviewed at a future date.

In December 2017, the CSO made a decision that 14 of the 16 largest AHBs examined (i.e. those with 300+ homes in their property portfolios) in the initial phase of the review should be re-classified as falling within the public sector, under the broad local government classification. This decision has been sent to Eurostat for their consideration and ultimate determination.

While a final decision has yet to be taken by Eurostat regarding the classification of AHB expenditure, detailed analysis of the potential impacts on the Government debt and expenditure will be completed by the relevant Departments and Agencies. To inform these considerations, the CSO is currently engaged in collecting the required data to compile the end-March 2018 Excessive Deficit Procedure (EDP) notification tables (also known as the Maastricht returns), covering general government deficit and debt. At the same time, the Department of Finance is also preparing the Stability Programme Update 2018. This will take full account of the figures published by the CSO as part of the government finance statistics release.

My Department is examining the decision by the CSO in detail, including the rationale for their recommendation, in close collaboration with my colleague Minister Donohoe's Depart-

ments, to assess the implications as well as identifying what measures can be taken to manage or mitigate the potential impacts on the capacity of the AHB sector in the supply and management of social housing.

The potential impact of this decision on the fiscal space will depend on the outcome of these deliberations, and those between my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in particular, regarding delivery of social housing units by AHBs. Similarly, the potential impact on the housing funding programmes as referred to by the Deputy is being examined both through this process and internally within my Department.

Notwithstanding the assessment by the CSO, the Government still sees an important role for the voluntary housing sector in contributing to delivery of social housing under Rebuilding Ireland, and we intend to press ahead with our ambitious plans to use all mechanisms and schemes, including through the AHB sector, to ensure that we maintain our planned momentum towards meeting the 50,000 Rebuilding Ireland social housing target.

### Apprenticeship Data

348. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons enrolled in apprenticeships in his Department and State agencies under his remit, by gender, in tabular form; and if he will list each such apprenticeship. [5260/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** There are currently no staff in my Department enrolled in apprenticeship programmes.

The details requested in relation to bodies under the aegis of my Department are a matter for the individual bodies concerned. Arrangements have been put in place by each Agency to facilitate the provision of information directly to members of the Oireachtas.

The contact email address for each agency is as below:

Agency	Email address
An Bord Pleanála	Oireachtasqueries@pleanala.ie
Ervia, Gas Networks Ireland	oireachtas@ervia.ie
Housing Sustainable Communities Agency	publicreps@housingagency.ie
Housing Finance Agency	oireachtas.enquiries@hfa.ie
Irish Water	oireachtasmembers@water.ie
Local Government Management Agency	corporate@lgma.ie
Ordnance Survey Ireland	Oireachtas@osi.ie
Property Registration Authority	reps@prai.ie
Pyrite Resolution Board	oireachtasinfo@pyriteboard.ie
Residential Tenancies Board	OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie
Valuation Office	oireachtas.enquiries@VALOFF.ie

### Voluntary Sector

349. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he or officials in his Department have played a part or have attempted to interfere, limit or prevent voluntary sector organisations funded by his Department from engaging in advocacy work on behalf of their service users; if he or his officials would seek to or have

sought to prevent voluntary sector organisations funded by his Department from being critical of Government policy; his views on an article (details supplied) that uncovered attempts by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive to insert a gagging order into service level agreements with voluntary sector organisations funded by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5278/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation, and related services, for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities.

Many services are delivered by non-governmental service providers, on behalf of the housing authorities. As part of these contractual arrangements, the housing authorities may put in place service level agreements with the service provider to ensure effective services for homeless people are being provided and monitored through agreed arrangements.

In relation to the Deputy's specific query, service level agreements are a matter between the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive and the service providers, to which they provide substantial tax payer funding. Such agreements are important in order to ensure the best outcomes for those in need of homeless services. I see no conflict between the advocacy role of service providers and ensuring transparency and accuracy in relation to homeless service delivery.

As to my own Department, it is not the role of the Department or my own, as Minister, to interfere, limit or prevent any organisation from advocacy on behalf of their service users, whether funded by my Department or not - nor would I seek to prevent criticism of Government policy, whether it is coming from an NGO or, indeed, a State Agency.

### **Housing Assistance Payment Eligibility**

350. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will address an anomaly in the housing assistance payment, HAP, whereby properties which were provided under the former affordable housing initiative are not deemed to qualify for HAP even if the person otherwise qualifies; his views on a particular case (details supplied); the number of such properties that are affected by this policy in so far as his attention has been drawn to them; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5281/18]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Circular AHS1 of 2009 - Measures to deal with Unsold Affordable Homes gives local authorities the option of bringing Unsold Affordable (USA) dwellings in their ownership into temporary social housing use through the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP) (formerly known as the Social Housing Leasing Initiative (SHLI)) or the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS). This purpose of this initiative is to ensure that the outstanding loans on the dwellings remained performing loans and in return the units would be made available for social housing use on a temporary basis, with an AHB or private management company in place to manage the tenancy and the unit. As a housing option it may be used to accommodate social housing applicants, households on rent supplement for more than 18 months or homeless persons returning to mainstream accommodation.

In parallel to this, since 2009, my Department has also funded the permanent acquisition of unsold affordable units, either taken from the SHCEP scheme, progressing from temporary leased units to permanent local authority owned stock, or unsold affordable dwellings taken

directly into social housing stock.

While the first priority for local authorities will continue to be to sell affordable housing to eligible purchasers, section 96(11) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 provides that, where the authority becomes satisfied that the property is no longer required for the purposes of affordable housing or social housing, it may be used for another purpose connected with its functions or be sold on the open market.

In relation to the issue raised, details have been sought and will be reviewed and a reply will be forwarded to the Deputy in accordance with Standing Orders.

### **Shooting Rights**

351. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the reason for the delay in processing applications for shooting deer; the reason they are issued for a short length of time (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5224/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** Wild deer in the State are protected under the Wildlife Acts. There is an annual open season during which deer can be legally shot under licence. The open season for deer operates generally from 1 September to the last day of February, depending on the species and gender of deer. My Department has granted over 5,000 deer hunting licences for the current deer hunting season. Licences are issued for an annual period with all licences expiring on 31 July, 2018.

Control of deer on private property is the responsibility of landowners who may apply to my Department for a permission under section 42 of the Wildlife Acts to cull deer where this is necessary outside the annual open seasons. These permissions offer a facility 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 only issued where there is evidence of such damage.

My Department has granted a number of Section 42 permits in recent years to the facility in question in the area in question to control deer. I am not aware of undue delay in the processing of these applications and there is no application outstanding at present from the facility referenced by the Deputy.

### **Internal Audits**

352. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her Department has completed an external quality assurance assessment of its internal audit function as required by the Institute of Internal Audit standards that were introduced in 2012 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5107/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** In accordance with the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) International Standards, my Department engaged a firm of external professional auditors in November 2017, through competitive tender, to perform an external assessment of its internal audit function. The assessment includes comparison of the practice of internal audit work with the IIA Standards and Code of Ethics, and reviews the quality of internal audit work undertaken.

The external assessment report is being drafted and the final report will issue to my Department shortly. I am assured that any issues arising from the assessment will be addressed

promptly.

### **National Raised Bog Management Plan**

353. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the status of Moanveanlagh bog (details supplied) County Kerry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [5138/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The National Raised Bog Special Areas of Conservation Management Plan 2017-2022, published in December 2017, sets out how the raised bog special areas of conservation are to be managed, conserved and restored and how the needs of turf cutters are to be addressed, including exploring the options in terms of certain provisions of article 6 of the Habitats Directive.

In certain areas where there is a difficulty in finding relocation solutions for turf cutters, the Department, in consultation with turf cutter interests and within the framework of the National Plan, is considering whether the provisions of article 6.3 of the Habitats Directive could be utilised to provide for cutting within areas of a number of special areas of conservation. Under article 6.3 of the Directive, consent could only be given to cut turf on a raised bog special area of conservation where it can be shown by rigorous scientific investigations that such cutting will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the site.

If it can be demonstrated that turf cutting within a proposed location in a special area of conservation would not impact on the integrity of a European site, the appropriate consent would then be required from the relevant public authority.

As set out in the National Plan, Moanveanlagh Bog Special Area of Conservation is one of the sites being examined as regards the potential for domestic turf cutting on the site in accordance with the provisions of the Directive. Initial scientific investigations have been carried out on the site and the scientific investigations will be concluded as soon as possible.

### **EU Directives**

354. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her views on proposals by an organisation (details supplied) regarding the implementation of the EU birds and habitats directive. [5169/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department has commenced engagement and dialogue with representative of the sectorial organisations on their request for a review of the earlier agreement on the implementation of the Nature Directives. The proposals raised by the sectorial organisations will form part of the dialogue in relation to the review of this agreement.

### **National Parks and Wildlife Service**

355. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the cost of restoring the National Parks and Wildlife Service, NPWS, farm plan scheme to the scale that operated in funding and participation levels before adjustments were made to its operation in 2010; the number of persons who participated in the NPWS farm plan scheme in each of the years 2010 to 2017; the funding allocated and expended on the programme in each

of the years 2010 to 2017, in tabular form [5170/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department has operated a farm plan scheme since 2006. Over 650 farm plans were approved under this voluntary scheme. Farmers have been incentivised to go above and beyond their statutory requirements in designated lands for particular habitats or species. One of the primary aims of the scheme is to trial bespoke measures for enhanced management of biodiversity at farm level, with a view to informing current and future measures under the Rural Development Programme.

The NPWS Farm Plan Scheme was entirely exchequer-funded. At its peak, the costs of the scheme were circa €5 million per annum. The scheme was scaled back in 2010 due to budgetary constraints arising from the financial crisis. Some of the measures previously supported in the NPWS farm plan scheme are now provided for under GLAS, the national agri-environmental scheme. It is appropriate and sensible in my view to use EU funding, via the RDP, insofar as possible, to fund measures required under the EU Nature Directives.

The number of farmers that participated in the NPWS Farm Plan Scheme and the funding allocated and expended on the programme in each of the years 2010 to 2017 are outlined in the following table. Some payments relating to actions undertaken in 2017 will be made in 2018 for administrative reasons.

Year	Number of contracts	Budgetary allocation	Actual expenditure
2010	546	€5.10m	€3.75
2011	667	€5.38m	€4.4m
2012	616	€5.14m	€3.96m
2013	415	€4.44m	€3.45m
2014	361	€3.14m	€2.67m
2015	176	€1.74m	€1.3m
2016	53	€1.00m	€0.44m
2017	45	€0.56m	€0.41m

### Apprenticeship Data

356. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of persons enrolled in apprenticeships in her Department and State agencies under her remit, by gender, in tabular form; and if she will list each such apprenticeship. [5253/18]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The information sought by the Deputy is as provided in the following table:

State Agency	Apprenticeship Scheme (Y/N)	Total No. Participating	No. Male Apprentices	No. Female Apprentices	Details
Irish Museum of Modern Art	Y	1	-	1	Accounts Technicians Apprenticeship