

Written Answers.

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

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

Railway Stations

11. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to assist Irish Rail in the alleviation of the over-capacity issues at the train station car parks in Maynooth and Sallins, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7731/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I am aware of the increased demand for commuter services, particularly during peak commuter hours. The NTA's "Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) 2016-2035" provides a framework for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services in the GDA over the next two decades. The DART Expansion Programme, which is a cornerstone project of the strategy, seeks to progress a series of projects that will create a full metropolitan area DART network for Dublin with all of the lines linked and connected.

This integrated rail network will provide fast, high capacity, high-frequency electrified services to Drogheda on the Northern Line, Celbridge/Hazelhatch on the Kildare Line, Maynooth and M3 Parkway on the Maynooth/Sligo Line, while continuing to provide DART services on the South-Eastern Line as far south as Greystones.

In relation specifically to the North Kildare lines, the Deputy should note that since the upgrading and reopening of the Phoenix Park Tunnel in late 2016, commuters on the Kildare to Dublin Heuston line benefit from having the option of direct trains to Connolly, Tara Street, Pearse and Grand Canal Dock Stations.

Regarding the car parking facilities the Deputy's question refers to, I have been advised by the NTA that due to the extension of the Short-Hop fare zone to include Sallins & Naas Railway Station, coupled with the introduction of train services through the Phoenix Park Tunnel Link to serve city centre train stations, the level of car parking demand at this station has increased significantly. To address this issue, it is intended to expand the level of car parking at Sallins & Naas Railway Station during 2018 through an expansion of the car park on the north side of the station. Funding in the amount of €680,000 is being allocated to Iarnród Éireann this year in respect of this project. The position regarding Maynooth Station will be considered by the NTA next year.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure and services in the Greater Dublin Area. Iarnród Éireann receive Exchequer funding via the NTA in relation to the provision of car parking

at train stations on the heavy rail network. I understand that the total expenditure on station extensions including car parking facilities over the last five year period of 2013 to 2017 was €15.4 million.

In light of the NTA's responsibility in this area, I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for further reply on the issues raised.

Sport and Recreational Development

12. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the national policy framework will be announced in view of the fact that a public consultation paper was launched in November 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7819/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The public consultation process for the new National Sports Policy, to which Deputy O'Keeffe refers, was a most useful exercise. It resulted in the receipt of 54 submissions from a wide range of stakeholders including Government departments, National Governing Bodies of Sport, Local Sports Partnerships and private individuals.

My Department and I have closely examined the content of these submissions. The Deputy may be interested to note a number of the key themes emerging from the consultation process, including in particular:

- The vital role of education and training in the delivery of sports measures;
- The need for increased investment in sport, focusing on lifelong participation programmes as well as additional support for high performance athletes.
- The need for greater Cross-Sectoral Co-operation with sports stakeholders and relevant Government Departments, working more closely with Local Authorities in particular; and
- The importance of continued investment in improving Sports Facilities locally, regionally and nationally.

In addition to a careful evaluation of all submissions, my officials have held a number of bilateral meetings with Government departments and other key stakeholders during the drafting process in order to inform decision making on the key challenges that confront the sector and the many complex issues that arise in relation to addressing those challenges.

I am pleased to indicate that this detailed work is nearing completion. Because of the complex, cross-sectoral nature of many of the issues relating to sport, I consider that the time taken to undertake this evaluation and consultation is very much worthwhile. I hope to be in a position to submit the draft Policy for the approval of my Government colleagues in the coming weeks. If approved, it will be published very shortly thereafter.

Question No. 13 answered with Question No. 8.

Sport and Recreational Development

14. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his position regarding the publication of the new national sports policy. [7522/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I thank the Deputy for

his question concerning this important policy development. Its importance reflects the highly consultative process that has been followed by my Department. A public consultation was initiated in late 2016 and resulted in the receipt of 54 submissions from a wide range of stakeholders including Government departments, National Governing Bodies of Sport, Local Sports Partnerships and private individuals. As indicated earlier, I think this was a most useful exercise in consultation.

My Department and I have closely examined all of these submissions and I consider it appropriate that I should highlight for the information of Deputy McLoughlin a number of the key themes that emerged from the consultation process. These include:

- The important role of education and training in the delivery of sports measures;
- The requirement for increased investment in sport, focusing on lifelong participation programmes as well as additional support for high performance athletes.
- The need for greater Cross-Sectoral Co-operation with sports stakeholders and relevant Government Departments, working more closely with Local Authorities in particular; and
- The necessity for continued investment in improving Sports Facilities locally, regionally and nationally.

My Department has also held bilateral discussions with Government departments and other key stakeholders in order to inform decision making on the key challenges ahead for the sports sector.

I am pleased to indicate that the detailed evaluation and drafting work is nearing completion. Because of the complex, cross-sectoral nature of many of the issues relating to sport, I consider that the time taken to undertake this evaluation and consultation is time well spent. I hope to submit the draft Policy for the approval of my Government colleagues in the coming weeks. If approved, it will be published very shortly thereafter.

Noise Pollution

15. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the action he will take to ensure the necessary resources and expertise are put in place in relation to a decision (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7509/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the Government recently approved my proposal to designate Fingal County Council as the noise regulator for Dublin Airport in order that Ireland fully complies with EU Regulation 598/2014.

The Regulation sets out how Member States should regulate noise at major airports, under a regulatory framework that provides for the measurement, management and on-going monitoring of airport noise.

My obligation as Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport is to put in place the structures to make sure that Ireland fully complies with the Regulation, which I will be doing by way of primary legislation.

The Government's decision to designate Fingal County Council as the noise regulator follows on from discussions between my Department, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and Fingal County Council. Those discussions included consideration of

the resource and skills requirements to carry out airport noise regulation, and it is agreed that Fingal will have to receive additional funding and will most likely need to bring in new specialist expertise.

Whilst it will be a matter for Fingal County Council to determine how best it skills up to carry out this new function, I can assure the Deputy that the draft legislation, which I plan to bring to this House later in the year, will include a provision for additional funding for Fingal.

There is no question of Fingal having to carry out this new function from within existing resource levels.

Sports Capital Programme

16. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he expects to unveil the large scale projects under the sports capital programme. [7524/18]

40. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the plans submitted by a group (details supplied) to his Department on the redevelopment proposals for its county ground and its request for funding under the sports infrastructure fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7501/18]

80. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the large scale projects under the sports capital programme will be opened. [7523/18]

85. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when a request for expressions of interest in the large scale projects under the sports capital programme will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7534/18]

93. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his position regarding the rollout of the large scale projects under the sports capital programme. [7531/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 16, 40, 80, 85 and 93 together.

The Sports Capital Programme (SCP) has been the primary means of providing Government support to sports clubs and organisations for sports capital works. Allocations under the 2017 round of the programme were announced on the 30th November (local projects) and 21st December (regional projects) with a total of €60m allocated. Under this most recent round of the SCP, the maximum grant which could be applied for was €150,000 for local projects and €200,000 for a regional project.

Outside of the Sports Capital Programme, my Department has also overseen Government support for significant sporting infrastructure including state contributions to the Croke Park redevelopment, the Aviva Stadium and Thomond Park. At present, my Department is administering the Government grants towards the redevelopment of Pairc Ui Chaoimh (total contribution €30m) and the Kerry Sports Academy at the Institute of Technology Tralee (total planned contribution €7.5m).

In the longer term, funding of sports facilities is being considered as part of the Sports Policy Review which will be finalised shortly. It is clear however, that there are a number of large sporting facilities which will seek Government support over the coming years.

Accordingly, as part of the discussions around the Review of The Capital Plan, Minister

Ross and I suggested the creation of a new Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF) for larger projects where the amount being sought from Government is greater than that available under the SCP. The new National Development Plan which is expected to be published shortly will include further detail of the new Fund.

My officials will draft the terms and conditions of the new scheme over the coming months. All projects funded under the scheme will be subject to the Public Spending Code and State Aid requirements prior to any funding commitments being made. In terms of calls for proposals, it is envisaged that at a minimum, the National Governing Bodies of Sport and local authorities will be asked to prioritise projects for possible inclusion. The results of the Cost Benefit Analysis/ Multi-Criteria Analysis for each project will be a key determinant in deciding which projects are included for funding. It is likely that projects will be allocated funding over a number of years and every effort will be made to ensure a spread of sports and a geographic spread of projects.

In relation to any specific projects, prior to the details and terms and conditions of the new scheme being finalised and relevant organisations having the opportunity to apply for funding, it is not possible to say which projects will be supported at this stage.

I hope to have these terms and conditions finalised in the coming months and an announcement to include how and when organisations can apply for the funding will be made at that stage.

Services for People with Disabilities

17. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to establish an office under the remit of the NTA which would operate as a one stop shop tasked with providing direct assistance and advice to persons with disabilities who encounter difficulties accessing public transport (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7715/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) has functional responsibility for promoting the development of an integrated, accessible public transport network.

The NTA has advised my Department that while it does not propose to establish a separate office such as the Deputy has suggested, it is assessing the potential of a more centralised general contact facility for public transport passengers in the context of multiple operators. According to the NTA, this would likely take the form of a small contact centre which would deal with some passenger queries centrally and would arrange a simple transfer to the relevant operator in the case of operator specific queries and issues. Such a centralised centre would also be available to provide information and assistance to persons with disabilities, recognising however, that many of those queries are likely to be redirected to the relevant operator.

Prior to proceeding with such a contact centre, the issue of cost and resources would require to be addressed by the NTA in conjunction with my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

I would also point out that while the NTA already plays a central co-ordinating role in relation to the provision of public transport services for people with disabilities, many of the required interactions with such users need to link with the operator providing the particular transport service. For instance, a request for assistance for wheelchair boarding or alighting on the rail system ultimately has to be handled by Iarnród Éireann – routing such a request through the NTA might not be as effective as a direct contact between the passenger and Iarnród Éireann

staff. The same applies in the case of bus services, particular Bus Éireann regional/inter-urban services, where pre-booking of the wheelchair space is required.

As I outlined to the Oireachtas Committee last week, I intend to appoint a board member to the public transport companies under my remit, who has personal knowledge and experience of the needs and difficulties of people with disabilities using public transport. The first board appointment will be to the NTA in the coming months.

Question No. 18 answered with Question No. 7.

Road Projects

19. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if funding will be provided to Cork County Council for the construction of a road (details supplied) as soon as the detailed design phase is completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7539/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in its area is a statutory function of local authorities in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act, 1993. Works on such roads are a matter for the relevant local authority to be funded from its own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of projects to be funded from these monies is a matter for each local authority.

Under the Strategic Grant Scheme, my Department gave a commitment in 2010 to provide grant assistance to Cork County Council in relation to the acquisition of land for the Carrigaline Western Relief Road. The commitment to part fund land acquisition on this road has been met but no grant commitment was given in relation to the construction of the road.

In the aftermath of the financial crisis there were major cutbacks in funding for the national, regional and local road network. This resulted in the severe curtailment in funding for road improvement grant programmes, including the Strategic Grant Scheme, in order to focus available funding on maintenance and renewal work.

The Building on Recovery Capital Plan 2016-2021 and the Capital Plan Review allocations mark a significant step forward in terms of restoring funding to the levels needed to maintain the road network in a “steady state” condition and allowing for some investment in road improvement schemes but it is going to take time for funding to build up to the required level. For now funding will largely continue to support the maintenance of the regional and local road network. While a limited number of improvement projects are scheduled to go ahead over the next few years, funding is not available to commit to additional schemes at this point.

My Department is, however, liaising with Cork County Council with a view to positioning the project for development in the post 2021 period.

Military Aircraft Landings

20. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the internal review by his Department of the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973 has concluded; and if so, when the report will be published.

[7737/18]

24. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of applications for exemptions for the carriage of munitions of war through Shannon airport received by his Department in 2017; the number of such applications that were granted; and the number that were refused. [7736/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 20 and 24 together.

The purpose of the ongoing internal review of the Air Navigation (Carriage of Munitions of War, Weapons and Dangerous Goods) Order 1973, is to identify the options available for various aspects of the Order. The internal review will be completed in the coming weeks.

The Chicago Convention, which is the main international treaty governing the operation of civil aviation, states that no civil aircraft may carry munitions of war over a state without that state's permission. This requirement is ratified in Irish law by the 1973 Order. Under the terms of the Order the carriage of weapons and munitions of war is prohibited in any civil aircraft in Irish airspace and on board any Irish registered aircraft, unless an exemption is granted by the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport.

In accordance with the provisions of the 1973 Order, my Department operates a procedure under which airlines wishing to carry weapons or munitions through Irish airspace or airports must apply for each flight at least 48 hours in advance. My Department seeks the views of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in relation to foreign policy issues and the Department of Justice and Equality in relation to security issues. The IAA is consulted in relation to aviation safety issues for applications involving munitions that are also categorised as dangerous goods. If any of these bodies objects, an exemption will generally not be granted.

I should point out that the internal review is examining the Statutory Instrument primarily from an administrative and legal perspective. There is no proposal to change the long-standing Government policy of permitting aircraft used by the defence forces of various nations to transit through Irish airspace and airports, subject to appropriate terms and conditions.

In 2017 my Department received 340 applications for exemptions under the 1973 Order for flights seeking to land at Shannon Airport. 334 applications were granted and six were refused. The statistical information sought by the Deputy is also published at the end of each month on my Department's website.

Rail Services

21. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the time-frame to publish the rail review (details supplied); the actions he plans to take to remedy the issues that were raised two years ago by the NTA's review in order to ensure that Iarnród Éireann is sufficiently funded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7716/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Rail Review Report was undertaken jointly by the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Iarnród Éireann and was published in 2016.

The purpose of the Review was:

- to look at the existing rail network;

- to identify the funding required both to maintain the network and to provide for necessary capital works;

- and to consider the gap in funding.

Since the Rail Review was published, there have been significant developments in relation to the level of funding available for rail investment and services.

Budget 2017 allocated over €50m in additional funding to Irish Rail in 2017 bringing the total (current plus capital) funding for the year to the company to over €300m. This significant increase in funding allowed for increasing investment in maintenance and renewal of the network and the rolling stock, and also to provide more funding for safety projects.

In Budget 2018 I secured an 8% increase in the overall Exchequer funding for PSO services across both the bus and rail networks. That means that a total of over €285 million will be allocated in 2018 to support the delivery of these socially necessary but financially unviable services across the public transport companies. Budget 2018 also provided for an increase in the multi-annual capital investment for public transport with a four-year capital envelope of €2.7 billion over the period 2018-2021. This represents a 30% increase over the original Capital Plan allocations for 2018-2021 and includes investment of over €1 billion in heavy rail maintenance and infrastructure.

The public consultation process held by the NTA following the publication of the Rail Review in 2016 helped to begin an informed discussion about the current and future role of rail transport in Ireland. Over 300 submissions were received in response to that consultation process. The NTA has prepared a report of those submissions, which it recently updated to reflect the additional funding which has been made available for rail infrastructure and services in Budget 2018.

The NTA's updated report on the consultation was received by my Department yesterday. Once I have reviewed it, my intention is to bring the updated report to Government for consideration. I would expect that the report would be published thereafter by the NTA.

Question No. 22 answered with Question No. 7.

Question No. 23 answered with Question No. 8.

Question No. 24 answered with Question No. 20.

Bus Services

25. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to make an incremental improvement to the bus fleet operating in Dublin; his specific targets to improve journey times, by year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7734/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I wish to advise the Deputy that following the mid-term review of the Capital Plan, Budget 2018 provides for an increase in the multi-annual capital investment for public transport with a four-year capital envelope of €2.7 billion over the period 2018-2021. This substantial multi-annual envelope includes funding of over €770 million for the BusConnects programme to fundamentally transform Dublin's bus system, so that journeys for bus passengers will be fast, reliable, punctual, convenient and affordable. At the heart of this proposal is the development of a core network of bus lanes served by radial routes and a network of park and ride facilities at key locations.

Work is ongoing on the redesign of the bus services network and also on infrastructure proposals for Core Bus Corridors which will be an integral part of the programme. When this work is completed the proposals will be launched for public consultations in April and May of this year. The results of the public consultations will inform the final decisions to be made on the network redesign and the Core Bus Corridors including specific routes and corridors.

Under the current Public Service Contract arrangements with Dublin Bus, the National Transport Authority monitor a number of service targets that include reliability, excess wait time (for high frequency services), punctuality (for low frequency services) and service quality.

In light of the NTA's responsibility in these areas, I have forwarded the Deputies' questions to the Authority for further information on the issues raised. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Services for People with Disabilities

26. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will report on the Government's pledge to invest to make public transport services more accessible for persons with disabilities. [7630/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Accessibility features, such as wheelchair access and audio/visual aids, are built into all new public transport infrastructure projects and vehicles from the design stage. Newer systems such as LUAS are fully accessible.

In Budget 2018 I secured a trebling of the funding provided for the accessibility retro-fit programme as part of the 4 year capital envelope for public transport announced. An amount of almost €28 million is being made available for accessibility upgrades for existing older infrastructure in the period 2018 to 2021. The additional funding will facilitate the continued roll-out of the programmes to install accessible bus stops, upgrade train stations to make them accessible to wheelchair users and provide grant support for the introduction of more wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) into the taxi fleet.

I intend to improve upon that in our National Development Plan over the next 10 years and beyond. Investment in public transport will be accelerated under the NDP to support the development of an integrated and sustainable national public transport system. A number of key new major public transport programmes are being considered under the NDP over the period to 2027. As with all new and recently developed public transport projects, these programmes will be fully accessible as part of the normal design.

Under the NDP, there will also be a continued investment programme to fund retro-fitting of older existing public transport facilities to enhance accessibility.

As I outlined to the Oireachtas Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport last week, in addition to an increase in funding to improve accessibility, we also need to have people with practical experience of the difficulties experienced by people with disabilities at the decision making table. Following consultations with members of the disability community, I decided to appoint a board member with such experience to the public transport companies under my remit. The first board appointment will be to the National Transport Authority (NTA).

Rail Network Expansion

27. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the proposed DART extension to Balbriggan; the timeframes for this; the plans for 2018 to advance this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7511/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority's (NTA) "Transport Strategy for the GDA 2016-2035" proposes implementation of the overall DART Expansion Programme. As the Deputy may be aware, the Government's budgetary framework for capital investment, "Building on Recovery: Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2016-2021", which was reviewed last year in the context of the Mid-Term Review of Capital priorities, delivery and funding, provided funding to progress a number of key public transport projects included in the NTA's strategy.

The DART Expansion Programme has a key role to play in delivering an efficient transport system. When fully implemented the enhancements to the heavy rail system provided for in the NTA's Transport Strategy, will create a full metropolitan area DART network for Dublin with all of the lines linked and connected. This integrated rail network will provide the core high capacity transit system for the region and will deliver a very substantial increase in peak-hour capacity on all lines from Drogheda, Maynooth, Hazelhatch and Greystones.

Following the Mid-Term Review of Capital priorities, Budget 2018 increased the multi-annual capital investment funding envelopes for the coming four-year period, including providing an enhanced capital envelope of €2.7 billion for public transport investment between 2018 and 2021.

This enhanced capital envelope includes funding in the order of €230 million for mainline rail and DART capacity enhancement and will allow acceleration of the initial stages of the overall DART Expansion Programme, focussing particularly at this stage on providing additional fleet to enhance capacity, and extending the electrified DART system.

Specifically, it will allow substantial progress on electrification of the Northern rail line as far as Balbriggan - now expected to be delivered in 2022 - and commencing work on the Maynooth line. The remaining elements of the DART Expansion programme are being considered in the context of the 10 year investment plan that will be published later this week.

In light of the NTA's responsibility in this area, I have forwarded the Deputies' questions to the Authority for further information on the issues raised. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Road Projects Status

28. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the Bonagee link road project in County Donegal; the timeframe for this project to commence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7502/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual national road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

I have, therefore, referred the Deputy's Question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my Office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days. work.

Rail Services

29. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures he will introduce to address the problem of overcrowding on the Maynooth to Connolly rail line at peak times for commuters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7504/18]

74. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if an assessment of the need for increased capacity on a number of rail services to Dublin from the County Kildare commuter belt will be carried out, specifically on the Kildare line via Hazelhatch, the Maynooth line and the Kilcock line in view of the fact that services are at full capacity and unable to match the needs of an increasing volume of persons; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7629/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 29 and 74 together.

As the Deputy is aware, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA).

The NTA's Transport Strategy for the GDA 2016-2035 proposes implementation of the DART Expansion Programme. The overall DART Expansion Programme has a key role to play in delivering an efficient transport system. When fully implemented the enhancements to the heavy rail system provided for in the NTA's Transport Strategy will create a full metropolitan area DART network for Dublin with all of the lines linked and connected. This integrated rail network will provide the core high capacity transit system for the region and will deliver a very substantial increase in peak-hour capacity on all lines from Drogheda, Maynooth, Greystones and Hazelhatch on the Kildare line.

The NTA, in conjunction with Irish Rail, continues to examine short, medium and longer term options for meeting increased commuter services demand. This includes the refurbishment of existing rolling stock that can be put into service in the second half of 2019 to provide additional capacity on commuter and intercity services.

The upgrade to the Phoenix Park Tunnel in 2016 at a cost of €13.5 million has seen commuters on the Kildare to Dublin Heuston line benefit from having the option of direct trains to Connolly, Tara Street, Pearse and Grand Canal Dock Stations. Further benefits to commuters will be provided by way of additional off-peak and weekend services through the Phoenix Park Tunnel.

In light of the NTA's responsibility in the area, I have forwarded the Deputies questions to the Authority for further information on the issues raised. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Airport Development Projects

30. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the construction of a second parallel runway at Dublin Airport; his engagement with stakeholders in this regard; his plans to establish a competent authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7578/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): In accordance with the National Aviation Policy, the Government fully supports the building of a second runway at

Dublin Airport and the development of the Airport as a hub airport with the necessary capacity to connect key existing and emerging global markets.

The daa - which has statutory responsibility to manage, operate and develop Dublin Airport - was granted planning permission by An Bord Pleanála in 2007 for a second runway. An extension of the duration of the planning permission was granted last year, for a further five years (to expire in August 2022).

Preliminary works under the first phase of construction, including preparation of the site, realignment and building of new roads, fencing and landscaping were completed in late 2017. The procurement process for the main construction works on the runway itself is now underway and is expected to be completed by Q3 2018 with construction to commence thereafter.

All pre-construction conditions attached to the 2007 planning permission were completed to the satisfaction of Fingal County Council prior to the commencement of preliminary works. This included the putting in place of a voluntary purchase scheme for dwellings, together with a property insulation scheme for homes and schools. The daa has also undertaken a range of other measures to communicate with all stakeholders, e.g. written communication, newsletters, public meetings, information sessions and one to one meetings where requested. I have also personally met with a number of residents' groups to hear their views and concerns and ensured that these concerns were passed on to daa.

EU Regulation (598/2014) concerning Noise Related Operating Restrictions at EU Airports entered into effect on 13 June, 2016. The Regulation requires the appointment of a State body – independent of the airport company – to regulate airport noise at Dublin Airport in accordance with prescribed procedures for assessing and, where appropriate, ensuring the adoption of measures to mitigate noise impacts. To ensure full compliance with this Regulation, I, with the support of Government, intend to appoint Fingal County Council as the Competent Authority. The necessary statutory arrangements are a priority objective for my Department in 2018. I also intend to appoint An Bord Pleanála as the Appeals Body for purposes of the Regulation.

It is my view that provisions of the Regulation – (including the appointment of an independent regulator, a detailed and technical assessment of airport noise, the application of international best practice noise management measures, a provision for public consultation and an independent appeals process) – represent a huge improvement on current arrangements and that full implementation is in the broad national interest and in the best interests of residents and Dublin Airport.

Tourism Promotion

31. **Deputy Maria Bailey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the way in which Dún Laoghaire could benefit more from Dublin's tourism industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7723/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies primarily in the area of developing national tourism policy, while the tourism agencies have operational responsibility for the implementation of this policy. The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for the board and management of Fáilte Ireland. Accordingly I have referred the Deputy's question to the agency for direct reply. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Noise Pollution

32. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason he is satisfied that Fingal County Council has the requisite expertise in environmental impact assessments, noise, aviation and other matters to fulfil the function of competent authority under EU Regulation 598/2014 as proposed by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7738/18]

73. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the rationale for appointing Fingal County Council as the official independent noise monitor for Dublin Airport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7543/18]

77. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason his Department formed the view that the measures that would be necessary to safeguard independence in the conduct of the competent authority functions under EU Regulation 598/2014 by the IAA would render the assignment of those functions to that body impractical. [7739/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 32, 73 and 77 together.

The Government has recently approved my proposal to designate Fingal County Council as the Noise Regulator for Dublin Airport in order that Ireland fully complies with EU Regulation 598/2014, which came into effect in 2016.

As the Deputies will be aware, an earlier proposal was that the Irish Aviation Authority would be designated as the Noise Regulator for the purpose of EU Regulation 598/2014. However, as I have explained previously, when this approach was subject to final legal review it was found to be impracticable in light of emerging EU case law. Ultimately, the measures necessary to ensure the functional separation and independence of a noise regulation unit within IAA would have been impractical to implement from a corporate governance point of view.

The Government's decision to designate Fingal County Council as the noise regulator followed discussions between my Department, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, the Department of Communications, Climate Change and Environment and Fingal County Council.

Options were limited in terms of identifying a State body that had the capability to take on this new function and make it work. Whichever body was chosen would need to build up new capacity to carry out what is an entirely new function. The decision was therefore heavily influenced by which bodies already had some of the required capabilities and structures and which also could be expected to build up the other requirements within a reasonable timeframe. I have every confidence in the suitability and capacity of Fingal County Council to carry out this important role.

The full details of how the Regulation will be implemented, including the role and responsibilities of Fingal County Council, will be set out in primary legislation, the drafting of which Government has mandated to commence immediately. I can assure the Deputies that the draft legislation will include a provision for additional funding for Fingal to ensure that it will have the necessary resources to carry out airport noise regulation. There is no question of Fingal having to carry out this new function from within existing resource levels. It is my intention to publish a draft Bill later in the year which will also include the appointment of An Bord Pleanála as the Appeals Body for purposes of the Regulation.

Park and Ride Facilities

33. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the progress made on the roll-out of park and ride facilities in Galway city; the sites identified; the completion date for the roll-out in view of the fact these objectives were first identified in the city development plan in 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7742/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. However, I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport, including provision of park and ride facilities across the country.

As the Deputy is aware, Park & Ride is a key component of the Galway Transport Strategy (GTS) published by Galway City Council and Galway County Council in 2016, and developed by the Councils with support from the National Transport Authority (NTA). The GTS has since been adopted into the development plans of the two local authorities and was a key factor in Galway City winning the European Green Leaf designation for 2017. The provision of particular infrastructure under the GTS, such as Park & Ride facilities at specific sites, is a matter for the relevant local authorities in the first instance.

I understand that there is engagement currently underway with the NTA with regard to potential funding towards developing Park & Ride sites under the Sustainable Urban Grants programme and also the roll-out of BusConnects to Regional Cities in the context of the upcoming 10 year National Development Plan.

Road Projects

34. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the expected timeframe for completion of the construction work on extra lanes on the N7 motorway. [7634/18]

44. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the upgraded section of the N7 will be to motorway status or as a three lane carriageway. [7635/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 34 and 44 together.

Regarding the classification of the widened Naas Bypass project I can confirm that the widened Naas Bypass will remain a motorway.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

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

Question No. 35 answered with Question No. 10.

National Play and Recreation Policies

36. **Deputy Kate O’Connell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to get primary school children living healthier and more active lives; if he is planning new initiatives in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7527/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Physical Activity Plan, launched in early 2016, contains a series of actions designed to foster increased physical activity by children and young people, including primary school children. My colleague, the Minister for Education and Skills, exercises lead responsibility for the majority of these actions.

Significant progress has been made in relation to these actions, details of which are available in a progress report published on the Healthy Ireland website in December 2017

(<http://www.healthyireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/NPAP-Summary-Progress-Report.pdf>)

In the context of a new National Sports Policy that I am currently finalising and which I expect to publish in the coming weeks, there will be a strong focus on increasing participation levels in sport and physical activity at all ages and particularly for children and young people.

Achieving such increased participation levels is a significant challenge that will require the development of new projects and programmes in the future as well as continued implementation of existing successful initiatives. I consider that a fundamental requirement in this context is to maintain and strengthen links between the various Government Departments, agencies and sporting organisations. The means to address this requirement will be set out in the new Policy.

Road Projects Status

37. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the budgetary allocation in 2018 for the M20 Cork to Limerick motorway; when he expects to progress to statutory planning; the overall timeframe for the delivery of the new motorway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7540/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

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

Regional Road Network

38. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to rectify the significant maintenance issues with local and regional roads in counties Carlow and Kilkenny following critical under-investment in maintaining regional and local roads networks since 2012; his views on funding allocations for 2018 being far below that which is required for maintaining regional and local roads across the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7632/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the relevant County or City Council, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the Council.

As regards State grants for regional and local roads, the recession resulted in a major reduction in funding for the road network and these cuts had to be applied across the board.

The publication of the Capital Plan 2016-2021 in 2015 marked a move in the right direction in terms of restoring capital funding for the transport sector and this has been enhanced by the extra funding allocated under the Capital Plan Review. Maintenance and renewal of the road network will be the main priority over the capital plan period and most of the roads capital budget is earmarked for such essential work. In this context the Capital Plan provides for a gradual build up in capital funding towards the levels needed to support the adequate maintenance and renewal of the network.

Grant allocations this year represent a significant increase with Carlow County Council receiving a total allocation of €4,488,690 and Kilkenny County Council a total allocation of €11,972,000. In addition ring-fenced funding of €10 million is being provided for the Community Involvement Scheme this year and local authorities will be able to apply for funding under that heading.

I continue to emphasise to local authorities the importance of prioritising expenditure on roads when allocating own resources. It is a matter for each local authority to assess its priorities and draw up a roadworks programme for the year based on the State grant funding and own resources available to it.

Capital Expenditure Programme Review

39. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his Department's main capital investment priorities in the context of the ongoing review of the capital investment plan; and the status of the key capital projects within his Department's scope. [7745/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the Government has proposed that a ten year capital plan will be set out which will take account of the National Planning Framework. In relation to transport infrastructure, the Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport sets out the overarching priorities for investment in our transport network. My Department has worked closely with relevant Departmental colleagues on the development of both the ten year plan and the new National Planning Framework and I look forward to the publication of both in the coming days.

The Deputy is also aware that in last year's mid-term review of the current capital plan - Building on Recovery – I secured the largest increase in capital funding of all Departments out to the period 2021. That increase will allow for accelerated delivery of projects across the transport, tourism and sport areas of my Department's work programme.

In public transport for example, over €770million has been allocated for the implementation of the Bus Connects programme which commenced last year and which will continue throughout 2018. Increased allocations have also been provided to Iarnród Éireann to invest in its heavy rail maintenance programme, as well as improved signalling and a national train control centre which will benefit the network as a whole. Funding has also been provided to move ahead with

the DART Expansion programme with electrification of the Northern rail line as far as Balbriggan expected to be delivered in 2022 and work commenced on the Maynooth line.

In roads, construction has already started on the M7 Naas to Newbridge motorway widening, Sallins By-Pass and Osberstown Interchange scheme together with the Grange Castle Business park approach roads (Adamstown & Nangor road upgrades), while the rolling programme of improvements on the N56 in Donegal is also continuing. The additional money provided in last year's mid-term review will allow for a number of additional roads projects to commence, such as: the Sligo Western distributor road, the Tralee northern relief road and the Killaloe bypass and R494 upgrade.

In relation to tourism, a new Greenways Strategy is currently being finalised which will provide the policy backdrop to the improved funding programme I announced in last year's Budget while development of the new brand for the Midlands region will also be completed.

In sports, I have announced a commitment of €16 million euros to develop a National Velodrome and Badminton Centre at the National Sports Campus in 2020 and 2021 while I have also announced the establishment of a new Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund to bring a more strategic approach to Government support of national and regional sporting facilities.

As the Deputy can see, there are significant projects underway or in preparation across my Department's remit and I look forward to the completion of these projects and the further development of our transport, tourism and sports infrastructure in the coming years.

Question No. 40 answered with Question No. 16.

Local Improvement Scheme Funding

41. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount of discretionary funding from his Department's financial allocations to local authorities that was for non-public LIS roads in 2016, 2017 and 2018; the amount that will be available for LIS in each of the years 2019 to 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7749/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the local authority's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

In 2016 and 2017 local authorities were able to use up to 15% of their Discretionary Grant for LIS.

As my colleague Minister Ring has indicated that he will be allocating €10 million in ring-fenced funding to LIS in 2018, the option of using this Department's Discretionary Grant funding for LIS is not applicable this year. I have taken funding initiatives in two areas and set aside €10 million for both the Community Involvement Scheme and for Drainage Grants.

I will be liaising with Government colleagues in relation to funding arrangements for future years.

Tourism Project Funding

42. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the lakelands project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7533/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies in the area of national tourism policy. It is not directly involved in the development, implementation or management of individual tourism projects. These are operational matters for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland. Similarly, I do not have a direct role in relation to the development, implementation or management of branding strategies.

I can inform the Deputy that an initial capital investment of €1m was secured in Budget 2018 to allow Fáilte Ireland to progress its preparatory work on creating a distinctive tourism brand for the Midlands during 2018. Additional current funding of approximately €1.9m has also been provided to Fáilte Ireland in 2018 for Brexit-related activities and the development of the Midlands brand. The breakdown of this funding is a matter for Fáilte Ireland.

The nature of the project to develop a compelling proposition to attract substantial numbers of tourists into the Midlands means that very significant capital funding would be required over many years to provide the tourism products and attractions necessary. As a first step of this multi-annual project, Fáilte Ireland has developed an operational plan for the Midlands and the brand name and identity is scheduled to go live by the end of Q2 2018. It is important to note that the operational plan for the branding is the first step in a project that will require very significant capital and current funding and several years to deliver.

I am referring the Deputy's questions to Fáilte Ireland for further information and direct reply to the Deputy. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Brexit Issues

43. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the steps his Department is taking to mitigate the impacts of Brexit on the tourism sector; the steps he is taking to address the drop in UK visitor numbers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7748/18]

84. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of efforts to ease the impact of Brexit on the tourism industry. [7526/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 43 and 84 together.

I welcome the overall growth in visit numbers to Ireland in 2017. However, the decline in the numbers visiting from Great Britain remains a concern. The fall in the value of sterling against the euro following the Brexit vote in the UK has been the primary factor in this.

Tourism Ireland has a programme of marketing activity in place for 2018 to ensure Ireland is marketed appropriately with potential visitors from Britain. That marketing effort will continue throughout the year. In addition, Minister Griffin recently joined Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland to launch an initiative, specially designed to boost tourist numbers from Britain to the Wild Atlantic Way. A €1.35 million marketing campaign in Britain will be complemented by a Fáilte Ireland €500,000 programme to support businesses along the Wild Atlantic Way to position themselves to benefit from the campaign, as well as to boost its own marketing campaigns in Northern Ireland.

Additionally, Fáilte Ireland's 'Get Brexit Ready' programme offers a suite of industry supports, designed to help businesses meet specific Brexit-related challenges. The programme allows individual businesses to self-assess their exposures and risks and provides a range of interventions to match their needs.

Finally, in Budget 2018 €2m in capital funding was secured for Tourism Ireland to invest in strengthening its digital infrastructure, deepening its understanding of the all-important overseas consumer and developing new creative content. This will give Ireland real stand-out and inspire and motivate people across the world to visit Ireland.

Question No. 44 answered with Question No. 34.

Sports Events

45. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding plans to host a number of UEFA Euro 2020 games here. [7525/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): In 2014, Dublin won the right to host 4 matches of the UEFA EURO2020 tournament comprising three group games and one second round game. The bid to host was a collaborative effort between the Football Association of Ireland, Dublin City Council and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.

Since then a Local Organising Structure (LOS) has been developed with the participation of the three main stakeholders and other organisations key to delivering the tournament. This structure includes a Project Board to oversee the overall project, a Project Working Group to manage it on a day-to-day basis and a number of sectoral sub-groups. The LOS is working closely with UEFA to meet their hosting requirements for EURO 2020 in areas such as the presentation of the stadium, broadcasting facilities, fanzones and spectator experience, transport, security, commercial rights protection, and national promotion.

The first major event of EURO 2020 will be the live televised draw for the qualifying groups which will take place on December 2, 2018. In September last, the Dublin LOS won the bid to host this event and accordingly attendees representing UEFA's 55 National Associations will come to the Convention Centre Dublin for the event next December. It is expected that there will be 650 guests, including almost 300 delegates from the participating countries, 350 media representatives accredited to cover the event, and more than 70 broadcasters to show the draw live to an audience of 140 million around the world

Separately, UEFA decided last December that qualifying groups in the finals will be staged in "paired cities" and Dublin has been paired with Bilbao for its group. The full pairings are

Group A: Rome and Baku

Group B: Saint Petersburg and Copenhagen

Group C: Amsterdam and Bucharest

Group D: London and Glasgow

Group E: Bilbao and Dublin

Group F: Munich and Budapest

Preparations for EURO 2020 will intensify over the next two years with tickets going on sale in 2019 and qualifying being completed in March 2020.

Drug and Alcohol Testing

46. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reports he has received on roadside drug testing since its implementation; if further legislative measures need to be taken; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7513/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The legislation on preliminary drug testing for road traffic offences is implemented by An Garda Síochána. There is no formal reporting mechanism in place, nor do I intend putting one in place, in respect of the implementation of the legislation.

However, my Department remains in constant contact with An Garda Síochána and the Medical Bureau of Road Safety and no additional legislation in this area have been identified as necessary to date.

National Development Plan

47. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which it is expected the upgrade of road and rail transport can be provided for in the proposed capital plan; the degree to which adequate funding will be provided in tandem with the objectives of the national development strategy (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7750/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the Government's new 10-year National Development Plan (NDP) will be published shortly. In line with the recommendations of my Department's 2015 Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport, a continuing key priority for investment in transport under the NDP will be to protect the quality and value of the existing extensive road and rail networks to ensure quality levels of service, accessibility and connectivity. Prioritisation of this type of investment is also a key finding of a recent Public Investment Management Assessment which was conducted by the International Monetary Fund at the invitation of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

The National Development Plan will also prioritise key investment actions to progress new key capital transport programmes and projects over the period to 2027. Investment in any new public transport programmes under the National Development Plan will be subject to the relevant appraisal processes and value for money tests as required under the Public Spending Code.

Greenways Development

48. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of plans for the roll-out of the strategy on the future development of greenways and rural cycling; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7519/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Strategy for the future development of Greenways will assist and expedite the strategic development of Greenways in key locations around Ireland. The strategy will also ensure that Greenways are con-

structed to an appropriately high standard in order to provide a quality experience for all users. The Strategy will focus on Greenways rather than cycling infrastructure in the wider sense.

Following publication of the Strategy my Department will announce a Greenway funding call to local authorities. The current budget available to my Department for the delivery of Greenways in the period 2018 to 2021 is almost €56m. I expect to announce the criteria for awarding funding at the same time as the Strategy is published, with funding awarded late in 2018. This is to provide local authorities with as much time as possible to progress the planning of their Greenway proposals. The Strategy will be published during Q2 of 2018.

Services for People with Disabilities

49. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way in which he plans to vindicate the rights of persons with disabilities using public transport in view of the imminent ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7515/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Government announced last month its decision to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD).

Article 4.2 of the Convention provides for the progressive realisation of accessibility rights which would include practical progress on public transport accessibility. This is broadly the approach adopted in Ireland in relation to public transport.

Accessibility features, such as wheelchair access and audio/visual aids, are built into all new public transport infrastructure projects and vehicles from the design stage. Newer systems such as LUAS are fully accessible. However, there are legacy issues in relation to older infrastructure and facilities, for example Victorian era railway infrastructure. Significant investment has and will continue to be made to fund retro-fitting of older existing public transport facilities to enhance accessibility

I refer the Deputy to my reply to Questions (Ref no. 7715/18) and (Ref no. 7630/18) earlier today.

Motor Tax Exemptions

50. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to review the policy regarding charging motor tax on blood bikes; if his Department has considered the recent policy changes in the United Kingdom in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [3947/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Under current motor tax legislation exemptions are allowed for certain categories of vehicles, including State-owned vehicles and vehicles such as fire engines, ambulances and those used exclusively for mountain and cave rescue. Under the current system there is no provision for the exemption of motor tax for vehicles such as those used by Blood Bikes. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in the U.K. has advised that there have been no policy changes regarding the payment of vehicle excise duty for such vehicles.

I have no plans at present to extend the list of vehicles which are exempt from motor tax.

Questions - Written Answers
Sports Capital Programme

51. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the 2018 sports capital programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7518/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme (SCP) closed for applications on the 24th February. By the closing date, a record number of 2,320 applications seeking €155 million in grants were received. In November and December last, Minister Ross and I announced €60m in allocations to a record 1,800 projects under the 2017 round of the SCP. Full details of all these allocations are available on my Department's website and the priority in the medium term will be on advancing these projects.

In relation to future rounds of the SCP, my Department is undertaking a review of the 2017 round with a view to making recommendations on how to improve the process for future calls. This work is also examining what is feasible in terms of the scale and timing of the next round. I expect this review to be complete in the coming months and an announcement regarding the next round will be made at that stage.

Public Bike Schemes

52. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to correspondence copied to the NTA on 25 October 2017 by the ambassador of France to Ireland outlining serious concerns about the bicycle scheme in Galway city; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7741/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to cycle and public transport infrastructure. However, I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport, including the management of public bike schemes.

Decisions regarding contracts, operation and expansion of existing and proposed bike schemes fall under the remit of the National Transport Authority (NTA).

My Department is aware of the correspondence from the Ambassador of France to the NTA dated 25th October 2017, and to which the NTA issued a reply dated 4th December. As this is an operational matter under the remit of the NTA and also the subject of ongoing litigation, I do not consider it appropriate to comment further on this matter.

Road Network

53. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when emergency works will take place in an area (details supplied). [7537/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with

Section 19 of the Roads Act.

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

Rail Network Expansion

54. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the metro north project; and the expenditure to date on same. [7740/18]

76. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when public consultation will begin for the new metro north; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7544/18]

88. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the delivery of metro north; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7579/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 54, 76 and 88 together.

The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport and sustainable transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) including new Metro North.

Funding of over €700 million has been allocated under the Government's present Capital Plan 2016-2021 for planning, design and beginning construction of new Metro North, with construction work planned to commence in 2021 and passenger services expected in 2027.

The NTA, in collaboration with Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), has been undertaking an option analysis and selection study of possible metro alignments and station locations. It is my understanding that the NTA and TII expect that this process will be completed shortly, after which a public consultation process will be undertaken on the Emerging Preferred Route (EPR). Arising from this work a final route and station location will be established. It is also expected that Preliminary Design will commence early this year.

The 10 year capital plan which will be published shortly will provide a funding commitment to complete this significant addition to public transport.

Cycling Policy

55. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the data sent to him on injuries sustained by cyclists due to traffic accidents has been examined; and his plans to improve the safety of cycling particularly in urban Ireland. [7512/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department is currently examining the data on cyclist injuries and will revert with observations.

My Department fully supports the provision of safe and direct cycling infrastructure, in line with Smarter Travel and the National Cycle Policy Framework. Whilst significant investment has been undertaken in recent years in cycling infrastructure, I firmly believe that further continued investment is required to ensure cycling is seen as a safe and attractive option for cyclists of all ages.

I was delighted to have secured, as part of Budget 2018, a significant increase in the level of Exchequer capital funding available for investment in cycling infrastructure over the period 2018-2021. Capital investment of over €110m will develop cycling and walking infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) and Regional Cities over the next four years.

My Department is also currently preparing a National Greenways Strategy. Budget 2018 saw an increase of €30 million in the multi-annual allocation for Greenways bringing the total allocation for the development of Greenways for the period 2018-2021 to over €55 million.

In addition to these cycling-specific investments, other infrastructure investments will also significantly benefit cyclists. The considerable investment of about three-quarters of a billion euro for re-configuring the bus network as part of BusConnects will entail construction of new cycling facilities alongside bus routes on key routes including the provision of safe cycling facilities. In addition, some of the €135m funding that will be provided to local authorities in the GDA and the Regional Cities for Sustainable Urban Transport between 2018 and 2021 will support better traffic management, bus priority measures and pedestrian infrastructure - which will benefit the safe and effective movement of all.

My Department continues to be fund behavioural change measures to encourage more people to take up cycling and to ensure cyclist safety. Funding is provided to the NTA for programmes such as Workplace and Campus travel programmes and the Green Schools Programmes, Cycling Ireland for the “Cycle Right” school training programme, and to the RSA for road safety promotion including campaigns specifically targeting cyclist safety.

This coordinated investment strategy will, I believe, have a lasting transformative effect on the levels of cycling, and our transport network over the coming years.

National Development Plan

56. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way in which funding under the national development plan will be used for public transport; if the threat to some rail routes and the continued lack of investment in the western rail corridor will be addressed in that plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7717/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the Government’s ten-year National Development Plan will be published shortly along with the National Planning Framework. The National Development Plan will prioritise key investment actions that protect the quality and value of the existing extensive public transport networks. It will also progress new key capital public transport programmes over the period to 2027 to address urban congestion and emerging capacity constraints in our main cities. Investment in any new public transport programmes under the National Development Plan will be subject to the relevant appraisal processes and value for money tests as required under the Public Spending Code.

The role and potential of rail is intrinsically linked to where people live, work and wish to travel and these very issues form the core of the Government’s new National Planning Framework over the period to 2040. The National Planning Framework will form an important context for consideration of issues raised by the Rail Review Report which was undertaken jointly by the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Iarnród Éireann and published in late 2016. As the Deputy is aware, the NTA held a public consultation on the published Review which helped to begin an informed discussion about the current and future role of rail transport in Ireland. Over 300 submissions were received in response to that consultation process. The NTA has

prepared a report of those submissions, which it is currently updating to reflect the additional funding which has been made available for rail infrastructure and services in Budget 2018.

With regard to the Western Rail Corridor, the Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to provide for an independent costing and review of the Western Rail Corridor Phase Two between Athenry and Claremorris. It also commits that no measures will be taken to prevent the future reactivation of the Western Rail Corridor for rail use. The costing and review has not been undertaken pending the advancement of the wider processes underway, including the Rail Review and the National Planning Framework, that are highly relevant to the general rail environment.

Once I have received and reviewed the NTA's updated report on the Rail Review consultation, it is my intention to bring it to Government for consideration. As I have previously stated, I have no plans regarding the closure of any parts of the rail network. The Taoiseach also gave assurances in the Dáil recently that there are no plans in this regard.

Ports Development

57. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to develop Rosslare Europort, County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7542/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Deputy will be aware that Rosslare Europort is unique among the State-owned ports as it is not a commercial company operating under the Harbours Acts, but is instead operated as a division of Iarnród Éireann. The status of the port, and whether its current status potentially inhibits its development, was most recently considered in a strategic review, commissioned by my Department, and carried out by Indecon Economic Consultants.

Their report concluded that the creation of an independent port authority would be extremely difficult, given the Port's complex legal structure. Instead, it was recommended that the Port remain in public ownership and that the possibilities for increased private sector involvement be investigated.

In order to assist Iarnród Éireann's overall consideration of how best to move forward, the company then engaged consultants to assess market interest. The assessment was largely positive in terms of the potential for increased private sector investment in the port; however, it did identify possible implementation issues due to the complicated legislative basis of the port.

Following that assessment my Department sought and received detailed advice from the Office of the Attorney General on the matter. That advice identified a number of legal issues with any such proposal and those issues remain under consideration by my Department.

The Deputy may also be interested to know that Iarnród Éireann is currently undertaking a strategic review of Rosslare Europort and expects to have this completed by the end of March.

In addition, the Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO), in conjunction with my Department, has commenced a study into the use of the UK Land-bridge by Irish importers and exporters. The purpose of this research is to establish the volume of traffic using the UK Land-bridge at present, the likely consequences that Brexit will have on Land-bridge usage and the various alternative options that may be viable. This piece of research is also expected to be completed by the end of March and should inform the potential for the future utilisation of all Ports, including Rosslare Europort.

Road Projects Status

58. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to provide funding for the extension of the M3 motorway to Cavan town and the east-west link; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7729/18]

91. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the N2 with a view to upgrading it to motorway status in view of the number of recent accidents on this route; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7728/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 58 and 91 together.

Proposals to deliver an upgraded East-West route linking Dundalk to Sligo, taking in Cavan, involve linking elements of the national road network and regional roads along as direct a route as possible. Essentially the route involves upgrade/realignment works on the regional routes from Dundalk to Cavan and on national routes from Cavan to Sligo.

As regards the regional road aspect of the proposal, the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in its area is a statutory function of local authorities in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act, 1993. Works on such roads are a matter for the relevant local authority to be funded from its own resources supplemented by State road grants.

My Department provided funding to Cavan County Council (acting as lead authority with Monaghan and Louth County Councils) with over €2m in the period 2007-2014 to progress the regional road element of the project to preliminary design.

This year I have given an allocation of €25,000 to Cavan County Council to enable the Council to undertake a preliminary appraisal, in line with the current requirements in the Public Spending Code and the Capital Investment Framework, of the Cavan to Dundalk section of the route. The aim of this appraisal would be to assess the extent to which the scheme or elements of it can be justified in terms of appraisal and advanced for further consideration in relation to schemes for development post 2021.

As regards the national road projects mentioned, as Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

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

Tourism Project Funding

59. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way in which Ireland's Ancient East is performing; the way in which he plans to grow overseas numbers to the Ancient East region including counties Laois and Offaly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7535/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies in the area of national tourism

policy development. It is not directly involved in the management or development of individual tourism projects. These are operational matters for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland. Similarly, I do not have a direct role in relation to the development, implementation or management of Experience Brands, such as Ireland's Ancient East.

Accordingly, I have referred the Deputy's question to Fáilte Ireland for direct reply to the Deputy. Please contact my private office if you have not received a reply within ten working days.

Park and Ride Facilities

60. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he plans to introduce bus based park and ride facilities on the main approaches to Dublin city; the timeframes in this regard; the locations being considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7735/18]

82. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to increase capacity in the park and ride facilities in the commuter belt regions of north County Kildare (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7610/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 60 and 82 together.

As the Deputy is aware, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development and implementation of public transport and sustainable transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) including bus infrastructure.

The Government's Budget 2018 announce last October provides for an increase in the multi-annual capital investment for public transport with a four-year capital envelope of €2.7 billion over the period 2018-2021 including an investment of over €400 million in 2018. This represents a 30% increase over the original Capital Plan allocations for 2018-2021 and includes increased funding for the heavy rail network.

Over €770 million will be invested in the BusConnects programme to fundamentally transform our bus system, so that journeys for bus passengers will be fast, reliable, punctual, convenient and affordable. At the heart of this proposal is the development of continuous bus lanes as far as is practicable along the busiest bus corridors along with a network of park and ride facilities at key locations. Work is ongoing on the redesign of the bus services network and also on infrastructure proposals for Core Bus Corridors which will be an integral part of the programme. When this work is completed the proposals will be launched for public consultations in April and May of this year.

The results of the public consultation will inform the final decisions to be made on the network redesign, Core Bus Corridors and park and ride facilities.

I am advised that due to the extension of the Short-Hop fare zone to include Sallins & Naas Railway Station, coupled with the introduction of train services through the Phoenix Park Tunnel Link to serve Connolly, Tara, Pearse and Grand Canal Dock, the level of car parking demand at this station has increased significantly. To address this issue, it is intended to expand the level of car parking at Sallins & Naas Railway Station during 2018 through an expansion of the car park on the north side of the station. Funding in the amount of €680,000 is being allocated to Iarnóid Eireann this year in respect of this project.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter I have referred your question to the NTA for an update on the issues raised. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Harbour Authorities

61. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the communications he has had with Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and-or Dún Laoghaire harbour with regard to the implementation of the Harbours Act 2015 and the transfer of ownership; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7514/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company, as a Port of Regional Significance, is designated under National Ports Policy 2013 for transfer to Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council. The port has no commercial shipping since 2015.

The process of transferring governance of Dún Laoghaire Harbour Company to Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council is, I understand, nearing completion. The transfer and the future operational structures of the port are primarily matters for agreement between the Council and the port.

The Chief Executive of the Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council presented the final due diligence report to Councillors at the Council meeting held on 9 January 2017. As the report raised a number of issues for further clarification, the Chief Executive (CE) engaged a risk and finance consultant to carry out a risk assessment. This will enable the Council to fully understand the implications of each model of transfer, and the responsibility that will transfer in financial and other terms.

My officials have been in touch with the port on this issue over several months. The port has engaged in the risk assessment process and in the provision of the information requested by the risk assessor.

My officials have now been informed by the Council that a draft Risk Assessment Report was recently submitted to the CE and that a special meeting of the Council is scheduled to take place on 6 March 2018 to discuss the transfer. It is expected that matters will then progress towards agreeing a model and a date for transfer.

Ports Development

62. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to overcome ownership issues regarding the future of Rosslare Europort (details supplied); his plans for the future of Rosslare Europort; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7713/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I refer the Deputy to my response to Question (7542) which I answered earlier.

Road Projects Status

63. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport

the status of the progress of the A5; his engagement with his counterparts in Northern Ireland on this project; the funding that will be made available for this project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7503/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The planning and implementation of the A5 upgrade project is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland authorities. The current funding arrangements in relation to the A5 are governed by the Stormont House Agreement and Implementation Plan - A Fresh Start. This Agreement reaffirmed the Government's commitment to provide funding of £50 million for the A5 project and committed an additional £25 million to ensure that the first phase of the project from Newbuildings to north of Strabane could commence once Northern Ireland authorities were in a position to start work on the project. As a result of the Capital Plan Review funding is being allocated to my Department to meet the Government's commitment in the Fresh Start Agreement.

While, in the absence of the Northern Ireland Executive the North South Ministerial Council has not been meeting, the Senior Officials Group, comprising Northern and Southern officials, established to oversee implementation of the Fresh Start Agreement has been continuing to meet.

Tourism Promotion

64. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of his efforts to capitalise on the exposure for Ireland following the release of a film (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7536/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for the tourism agencies. I have referred the Deputy's Question to Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Tourism Promotion

65. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to promote the Lee valley area in County Cork as a tourist destination; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7733/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies primarily in the area of developing national tourism policy, while the tourism agencies have operational responsibility for the implementation of this policy. The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for the boards and management of the two tourism agencies - Tourism Ireland in regard to overseas tourism marketing and Fáilte Ireland in regard to regional tourism development and domestic tourism promotion. Accordingly I have referred the Deputy's question to the two tourism agencies for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Rural Transport Programme

66. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the proposals his Department is working on in conjunction with the NTA to deliver on action points 251

and 254 of the Action Plan for Rural Development to work with rural communities to assess and implement improvements to existing rural transport routes and develop new rural transport routes as necessary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [54714/17]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Action no. 251 of the Action Plan for Rural Development refers to a commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government to conduct a review of public transport policy “to ensure services are sustainable into the future and are meeting the needs of a modern economy”, which will encompass the rural transport dimension. Following on from this commitment and as further committed to in the latter part of 2017, work is underway in my Department on reviewing public transport policy.

As part of this review, I am committed to convene and host a round-table policy discussion with a wide range of stakeholders from across the public transport and related sectors. The objective of this event is to facilitate an open and inclusive exchange of views from interested parties on the potential challenges and competing priorities likely to arise in the future across all aspects of public transport provision including economic, social and environmental considerations. I expect that the discussions will inform and enrich the policy review work currently ongoing within my Department.

I am determined to hold this event at the earliest possible date. However, at this stage the event has not been able to take place against a backdrop of recent and ongoing industrial dispute. As I have previously stated in 2017, as soon as industrial relations disputes are resolved my Department will confirm arrangements for the event.

Action no. 254, which relates to making Rural Transport Programme (RTP) vehicles accessible, falls to the National Transport Authority (NTA) to implement, given its responsibility for managing the RTP, now operating under the ‘Local Link’ brand. I have therefore referred this aspect of your question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Rail Services

67. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the reliability of the route profitability figures published in the 2016 rail review; if his attention has been drawn to anomalies in the figures; if so, the assurances he sought or was given that the figures were robust; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7714/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the Rail Review was jointly undertaken by the NTA and Iarnród Éireann.

My Department has consulted the NTA on the matter raised by the Deputy and the Authority has advised that it is not aware of any anomalies in the figures published in the Rail Review 2016.

The NTA has stated that it is confident that the route profitability methodology utilised by experienced consultants on behalf of the Authority and Iarnród Éireann is robust and suitable for the comparative analysis that was carried out.

Sport Ireland Administration

68. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of his Department’s commitment to make it mandatory for all bodies that are funded by Sport

Ireland to adopt the community and voluntary code of governance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7747/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): Corporate governance is a key priority for Sport Ireland funded bodies. To this end the Community and Voluntary Code of Governance will become a condition of funding. This will make it mandatory for all Sport Ireland funded bodies to start the process of adopting the Code. Larger organisations are to complete the journey to implementing its principles and practices on a comply-or-explain basis by 1st January 2019. Smaller organisations are to complete the journey to implementing its principles and practices on a comply-or-explain basis by 1st January 2020.

Sport Ireland has advised that, as of 10th January 2018, the 59 Sport Ireland funded bodies have signed up to the code. Of those 59, 12 have fully adopted it, with the other 47 working towards meeting the requirements of the code.

European Fund for Strategic Investments

69. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether his Department and transport agencies under its aegis are not doing enough to promote the use of the European Fund for Strategic Investments in terms of identifying and carrying out background work on public infrastructure projects that may meet the criteria for project selection in terms of additionality and revenue generation and may attract private co-financing investment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7744/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department hosted an Information day in June 2017 and previously in 2015 to raise awareness among project promoters about co-funding through the Connecting Europe Facility and financing options through the EIB including EFSI. The Information days were aimed at potential transport project promoters, including transport agencies under the remit of the Department, and attended by representatives from the European Commission, the EIB and INEA.

From 2014-2017 EIB has facilitated over €628m in transport financing in Ireland. Additionally from 2013 to present some €80m has also been availed of in Connecting Europe Facility co-funding for transport related projects. The EIB figure includes a project involving a private company using €75m of EFSI funding. CEF bonds and EIB finance has also been used for road projects during this period.

The transport elements of the forthcoming National Development Plan will be formulated taking account of the fiscal space available. EU assistance options including EFSI, CEF grants and EIB financing options can be considered where appropriate in reviewing project financing by agencies under my Departments remit.

Road Network

70. **Deputy Alan Farrell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the action he will take to upgrade the Lissenhall junction 4 onto the M1 to cater for the increasing demand from Donabate and Portrane, in view of the inadequacy of the current infrastructure (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7510/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for

Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

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

Road Projects Status

71. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the construction of the N22 Macroom bypass; if it will be released to tender for construction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7732/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

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

Road Network

72. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the transfer of surplus land on the Kilcullen to Waterford motorway (details supplied) has not been completed even though the project has been completed for ten years. [7507/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

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

Question No. 73 answered with Question No. 32.

Question No. 74 answered with Question No. 29.

Rail Services

75. **Deputy Mick Barry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on the recently published rail review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7726/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I refer the Deputy to my response to (PQ no. 7716), which I answered earlier.

Question No. 76 answered with Question No. 54.

Question No. 77 answered with Question No. 32.

Sports Funding

78. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the rebates available to sports clubs in respect of donations made to them by private citizens; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7520/18]

86. **Deputy Kate O'Connell** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way in which sports clubs can add value to private donations received; if a step by step guide to the process can be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7528/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 78 and 86 together.

In relation to my Department's engagement with sports clubs, the Sports Capital Programme (SCP) is the Government's primary vehicle for the development of sport and physical recreation facilities and the purchase of non-personal sports equipment. The most recent allocations under the Programme were made at the end of last year and full details of these allocations and a guide to making an application under the scheme are available on my Department's website.

Outside of the SCP, if a sports club or organisation is acquiring land or buildings, developing facilities, purchasing fixed non-personal equipment for sports activities or repaying a loan for these purposes, Section 41 of the Finance Act 2002 provides a tax relief incentive to individuals or companies to make a donation towards the cost of these projects. This is a Revenue Commissioners operated scheme and further details on how it operates, including a step by step guide to the scheme, can be found on the Revenue Commissioner's website www.revenue.ie/en/companies-and-charities/charities-and-sports-bodies/tax-relief-on-donations-to-certain-sporting-bodies/index.aspx.

Road Projects Status

79. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the A5-N2 project; its position within the new national development plan; the timeframe for the delivery and completion of the project; if the link between Lifford and Letterkenny, the N13-N14, forms part of the overall project; if a timeframe can be confirmed for this part of the project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7508/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The planning and implementation of the A5 upgrade project is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland authorities.

The current funding arrangements in relation to the A5 are governed by the Stormont House Agreement and Implementation Plan - A Fresh Start. This Agreement reaffirmed the Government's commitment to provide funding of £50 million for the A5 project and committed an additional £25 million to ensure that Phase 1 of the project (Newbuildings to north of Strabane) can commence as soon as the necessary planning issues have been resolved by the Northern Ireland authorities. The funding allocated to my Department as part of the Capital Plan Review

includes financial provision for meeting the Government's commitment regarding the A5.

The National Development Plan is about to be published and will outline the framework and broad direction for investment priorities over the period 2018 to 2027.

In relation to the national roads mentioned by the Deputy, as Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Within its capital budget, the assessment and prioritisation of individual national road projects is a matter in the first instance for TII in accordance with Section 19 of the Roads Act.

I have, therefore, referred the Deputy's Question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my Office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Question No. 80 answered with Question No. 16.

Rail Network

81. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of plans to electrify the Maynooth to Connolly rail line; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7505/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the NTA's Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035 which provides a framework for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services in the GDA over the next two decades, proposes implementation of the DART Expansion Programme.

In line with the Government's budgetary framework set out in Building on Recovery: Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2016-2021 published in September 2015, the Government's Budget 2018 provides for an increase in the multi-annual capital investment for public transport with a four-year capital envelope of €2.7 billion over the period 2018-2021.

This includes funding in the region of €230 million for mainline rail and DART capacity enhancement. This will enable commencement of the initial stages of the DART Expansion programme, focussing on additional fleet and extending the electrified DART system. It will also allow further progress to be made on the electrification of both the Northern rail line to Balbriggan and the Maynooth line.

Limited design work has been carried out on the electrification of the Northern and Maynooth lines to date. It is not possible at this stage to be prescriptive on the construction commencement date as this can only be finalised following the completion of initial design work. However, it is likely to be 2021 before building work starts, subject to receipt of the necessary statutory planning approval. Planning consent is likely to be sought during 2020.

In light of the National Transport Authority's (NTA) responsibility in this area, I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for further information on the issue raised. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Question No. 82 answered with Question No. 60.

Question No. 83 answered with Question No. 7.

Question No. 84 answered with Question No. 43.

Question No. 85 answered with Question No. 16.

Question No. 86 answered with Question No. 78.

Question No. 87 answered with Question No. 8.

Question No. 88 answered with Question No. 54.

Cycling Facilities Provision

89. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his views on whether there is sufficient investment in cycling infrastructure; his further views on whether cycling infrastructure is sufficiently well developed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7746/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): My Department fully supports the provision of safe and direct cycling infrastructure, in line with Smarter Travel and the National Cycle Policy Framework. Whilst significant investment has been undertaken in recent years in cycling infrastructure, I firmly believe that further continued investment is required to ensure cycling is seen as a safe and attractive option for cyclists of all ages. Investment in cycling infrastructure has a key role to play and in this regard, I was delighted to have secured, as part of Budget 2018, a significant increase in the level of Exchequer capital funding available for investment in cycling infrastructure over the period 2018-2021.

Capital investment of over €110m will develop cycling and walking infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) and Regional Cities over the next four years (2018-2021). This programme will provide safe, alternative, active, travel routes to help alleviate congestion by providing viable alternatives and connectivity with existing public transport infrastructure.

My Department is also currently preparing a National Greenways Strategy, building on the success of facilities such as the Great Western Greenway and the Waterford Greenway. Budget 2018 saw an increase of €30 million in the multi-annual allocation for Greenways bringing the total allocation for the development of Greenways for the period 2018-2021 to over €55 million.

In addition to these cycling-specific investments, some other infrastructure investments over the next four years will provide enhancements that will benefit cyclists. The considerable investment of about three-quarters of a billion euro for re-configuring the bus network and infrastructure will also entail construction of significant new cycling facilities alongside bus routes on the key radial routes into the city centre and provide safe cycling arrangements, largely segregated from other traffic along those corridors. In addition, some of the €135m funding that will be provided to local authorities in the GDA and the Regional Cities for Sustainable Urban Transport between 2018 and 2021 will support better traffic management, bus priority measures and pedestrian infrastructure - which will benefit the safe and effective movement of all.

My Department continues to be very active in promoting behavioural change to encourage more people to take up cycling and to cycle safely. We provide funding to the NTA on an annual basis for the delivery of behavioural change programmes such as Workplace and Campus travel programmes and the Green Schools Programmes. Furthermore, my Department engaged Cycling Ireland to develop a new national cycle training standard - "Cycle Right" – which was rolled out in January 2017 to approximately 15,000 primary school students. My Department

supports the great work that is being done by RSA in the promotion of safe roads for all road users, including the more vulnerable users such as cyclists and pedestrians. In addition my Department provides funding to local authorities throughout the country to assist in organising events and activities during Bike Week which further serve to increase the number of cyclists on our roads.

As part of an overall coordinated approach to the provision of an integrated sustainable transport network of cycling, walking and public transport, these various investments will allow us to further increase the numbers cycling, thereby easing congestion, improving public health and enhancing the liveability of our towns and cities; the investment will, I believe, have a lasting transformative effect on our transport network over the coming years.

Rail Network Expansion

90. **Deputy Shane Cassells** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the inclusion of the Navan rail line under the Government's capital plan will be prioritised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7500/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the Navan Rail Link Project was originally included under the Transport 21 Initiative and was to be developed in two Phases.

Phase 1 comprised the Dunboyne Rail Line project which involved the reopening of 7.5km of a railway line running off the Maynooth line, at Clonsilla, to the M3 interchange at Pace, near Dunboyne. This line opened in September 2010 with Park and Ride facilities at Pace, with 1200 car parking spaces available, and at Dunboyne, with 300 car parking spaces available. Phase 1 was completed in 2013 with the opening of Hansfield Station.

The plan for Phase 2 involved the extension of the Dunboyne Line between Clonsilla and M3 Parkway Station, onwards to north Navan. This development together with a number of other transport projects was postponed in 2011 due to the economic and fiscal crisis.

The National Transport Authority (NTA), which has statutory responsibility for development of Public Transport in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) which includes County Meath, included an examination of the Navan to City Centre Rail Corridor in the preparation of its Transport Strategy for the GDA for the period 2016-2035. At that time, the NTA concluded that, based on population and employment forecasts, the level of travel demand between Navan, Dunshaughlin and various stations to the city centre was insufficient to justify the development of a high-capacity rail link. Instead it is proposed that an enhanced bus service would be provided along the corridor in conjunction with the development of a bus hub by the local authority in Navan.

The NTA has indicated that this position will be kept under review and will be reassessed as part of the next review of the GDA Transport Strategy which, under the relevant legislation, the NTA is required to undertake every six years. The next review planned for 2021 will take account of the level of development in the catchment area over the coming years. Furthermore, the NTA has also indicated that the corridor identified for a rail link to Navan should be protected from development intrusion in the meantime. If the review of the GDA Transport Strategy concludes that a rail link is justified at that point, funding can be pursued in the context of the development and review of Capital Investment Plans.

Question No. 91 answered with Question No. 58.

Sport Ireland

92. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to reports (details supplied) published by Sport Ireland; his views on figures suggesting the emergence of a concerning pattern; and the measures he is taking to prevent an increase of this pattern. [7711/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Central Statistics Office (CSO) published a report “The Wellbeing of the Nation” in January 2018 which collated statistics from various existing sources. Using Sport Ireland’s survey, the “Irish Sports Monitor” (ISM), the CSO identified that participation in sport had fallen by 2% between 2013 and 2015.

Sport Ireland published the 2017 half year ISM report in December 2017 shows a 1% fall in participation levels compared to the same period in 2015. A full year report for 2017 is expected to be published in the second quarter of 2018 when a more definitive picture of the current situation will emerge.

The ISM report suggests that the drop in participation levels in recent years has been driven primarily by declining levels of participation among young males in particular. While this is still the group with the highest levels of participation overall, there is evidence to suggest that the upturn in our economic circumstances in the past few years has resulted in increased time pressures on certain groups, particularly young males.

Sport Ireland is committed to providing enhanced sporting opportunities targeted at those less likely to participate through the Local Sports Partnership network, National Governing Bodies and other partners. Programmes such as the Community Sports Hub initiative, Sports Inclusion Disability Programme, Go For Life and Women in Sport are aimed at providing targeted opportunities for disadvantaged groups, people with disabilities, older people and women where participation levels are generally lower than among comparator groups.

In the context of a new National Sports Policy that is currently being finalised there will be a strong focus on increasing participation levels in sport and physical activity at all ages. Achieving such increased participation levels is a significant challenge that will require the development of new projects and programmes in the future as well as continued implementation of existing successful initiatives. Additionally, my Department is co-chairing the National Physical Activity Plan implementation group. Significant progress has been made in relation to actions within that Plan, details of which are available in a progress report published on the Healthy Ireland website in December 2017 <http://www.healthyireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/NPAP-Summary-Progress-Report.pdf>

Question No. 93 answered with Question No. 16.

Northern Ireland

94. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress to date in the talks regarding the restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7977/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): As co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, the Government, working with the British Government, has spared no effort in supporting and facilitating talks on the formation of a new Execu-

tive, over many months. Fully functioning, devolved, power-sharing Institutions are the only way forward for Northern Ireland, and are urgently required.

Yesterday's developments in Stormont, in particular the DUP statement, are obviously of serious concern to all of us who want to see the establishment of a functioning, power-sharing Executive in Northern Ireland, and the other Institutions of the Good Friday Agreement.

I was in regular contact with the Secretary of State yesterday, both before and following this announcement, and will remain in close contact as we reflect on the next steps the two Governments need to take in relation to the political process.

The two Governments have worked steadfastly together over the past year, assisting and facilitating the parties in their efforts to reach agreement on the formation of a new power-sharing Executive. In recent days, we believed that there was a genuine basis for an accommodation between the two largest parties. Such an accommodation would then have facilitated broader engagement with all the political parties on the establishment of a new Executive.

Ultimately, however, devolved power-sharing government can only operate on the basis of an agreement between the two largest parties. Unfortunately, this has not been achieved to date, despite intensive engagement.

The Government is working with the British Government to see if there is any prospect of re-engagement with the parties in the period ahead.

As co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, the British and Irish Governments have an obligation to uphold and protect the letter and spirit of that Agreement, and we will also be considering how best to do so in the current situation.

Disabled Drivers and Passengers Scheme

95. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to amend or change the terms and eligibility conditions for receipt of primary medical certificates particularly in cases in which persons seeking same are severely disabled but have not lost a limb or have other significant medical conditions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8036/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As you may be aware, the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme provides relief from VAT and VRT on the purchase of an adapted car for transport of a person with specific severe and permanent physical disabilities, payment of a fuel grant, and an exemption from Motor Tax.

To qualify for the Scheme an applicant must be in possession of a Primary Medical Certificate. To qualify for a Primary Medical Certificate, an applicant must be permanently and severely disabled within the terms of the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Regulations 1994 and satisfy one of the following conditions:

- be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both legs;
- be wholly without the use of one leg and almost wholly without the use of the other leg such that the applicant is severely restricted as to movement of the lower limbs;
- be without both hands or without both arms;
- be without one or both legs;

- be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both hands or arms and wholly or almost wholly without the use of one leg;

- have the medical condition of dwarfism and have serious difficulties of movement of the lower limbs.

The Department has no role in the granting of Primary Medical Certificates to any applicant. The PMC is issued by the relevant Senior Medical Officer in the HSE, or failing that an appeal may be made to the Disabled Drivers Medical Board of Appeals. The Medical Board of Appeals must be independent in its determinations and so the Department has no influence over the outcome of any appeal.

The Scheme represents a significant tax expenditure. Between the Vehicle Registration Tax and VAT forgone, and the fuel grant, the scheme cost approximately €65m in each of 2016 and 2017. This figure does not include the revenue forgone in respect of the relief from Motor Tax provided to members of the Scheme.

The Scheme and qualifying criteria were designed specifically for those with severe physical disabilities and are, therefore, necessarily precise. From time to time I receive representations on behalf of individuals and organisations who believe they would benefit from the scheme but do not qualify under the criteria. While I have sympathy for such cases, given the scale and scope of the scheme, there are no plans to review the medical criteria eligibility at this time.

Tax Credits

96. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to change the criteria for the home carer tax credit to cover persons who are not married but living together; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7834/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Home Carer's Allowance (as it was then) was introduced in Finance Act 2000, in the context of a move to the partial individualisation of the income tax system. Such a system limits the transferability of tax bands and credits between jointly assessed spouses/civil partners, with the stated economic objectives of increasing labour force participation among secondary earners and reducing the numbers of workers paying the higher rates of income tax.

In tandem with this move towards an individualised tax system, and in order to ensure a balance was maintained between those going out to work and families with caring responsibilities in the home, a Home Carer's tax allowance was introduced for married one-income families where one spouse works primarily in the home caring for children, the aged or incapacitated persons.

This allowance was subsequently converted into the Home Carer Tax Credit (HCC), and the Deputy will be aware that in Budget 2018 I increased the HCC, which is of benefit to over 80,000 families annually, from €1,100 to €1,200 per annum.

As the policy rationale for the introduction of the HCC was directly linked to changes in the joint assessment of married couples, there are no plans at this time to extend the criteria further to encompass individuals who are not married and assessed as a single tax unit.

Excise Duties

97. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to adjust excise duties on petrol and diesel sales in view of the emerging evidence of diesel pollution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7886/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): A differential in the rate of excise applied to petrol and that applied to diesel exists due to diesel being the traditional fuel of business. Commercial vehicles such as heavy goods vehicles had no economically viable alternative and the reduced excise rate on diesel was applied in recognition of this and the role of transport in the wider economy where added fuel costs could ultimately translate into added retail prices.

Nonetheless I am aware that a balance must be struck between the different policy objectives, which of course include environmental objectives. When I am considering the appropriate excise rates applying to auto-fuels in advance of Budget 2019 I will consider all of the elements involved, including the environmental rationale of applying excise duty on auto-fuels.

Departmental Communications

98. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to ensure that a landline telephone number is supplied along with 1850 or 1890 telephone numbers by his Department including all Revenue departments (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7899/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy, I can confirm that a normal local landline phone number is provided along with an 1890 phone number for my Department, and that these numbers are available on the www.finance.gov.ie website.

As regards the Office of the Revenue Commissioners, I am informed by Revenue that the 1890 LoCall telephone service (which has been available for a number of years) is the best available service for the scale of its telephone business. However, I know that Revenue is very conscious that some of its customers are not being charged LoCall rates when making contact and have been actively seeking ways to reduce the cost burden for these customers. In that regard, Revenue is looking at new telephony technology which will provide a robust, reliable and scalable telephone service that does not rely on 1890 architecture. Revenue is also exploring the use of other technologies that will enable customers - using their existing 'inclusive packages' (bundle) - to 'phone' Revenue from links within its website and mobile app (RevApp) without incurring the 1890 telephone costs. Revenue hope to launch these, where feasible, sometime in 2018.

The Deputy may be aware that, in 2017, the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) held a public consultation on the current 5 classes of "Non-Geographic Number" (NGN) – **1800** (Freephone), **1850** (Shared cost – fixed charge per call), **1890** (Shared cost – charge per minute), **0818** (Universal access), and **076** (Nomadic). Views were invited from interested parties and Revenue made a submission expressing its dissatisfaction at the rates charged for 1890 calls. In its submission, Revenue agreed with ComReg's proposal that the retail charge that should apply to a caller for calling any of the NGN numbers at a particular point in time should not exceed the retail charge that would apply to that same caller for calling a Geographic Number at that same point in time. Revenue is awaiting the outcome of the ComReg consultation process and any recommendations therefrom.

On a wider note, I am further informed by Revenue that it has enhanced its range of online services to reduce the need for customer telephone contact. This includes a new website which is designed around customer needs which will help customers easily find the information they

are looking for. In addition, Revenue has rewritten a considerable portion of the content on the website in plain language to make it easier for customers to understand.

Tax Compliance

99. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 133 of 31 January 2018, the number of companies with section 110 designation which have not submitted accounts to the Revenue Commissioners for 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7909/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that 161 companies, who have notified Revenue that they are qualifying companies for the purposes of section 110 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 (TCA), have not filed financial statements along with their corporate tax returns for 2016.

Revenue is, in accordance with its normal compliance management activities, following up on this aspect of non-compliance, including, as appropriate, the levying of a surcharge in accordance with section 1084(2) of the TCA.

Tax Yield

100. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost to the Exchequer if alcohol consumption fell by 10%, 15%, 20% and 25%, respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7910/18]

101. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated effect on the economy if alcohol consumption fell by 10%, 15%, 20% and 25%, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7911/18]

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

Based on 2017 alcohol receipts and applying a simple straight line calculation the following table provides an estimate of the impact on the Exchequer in the event that alcohol consumption fell by 10%, 15%, 20% and 25% respectively.

| | | Total excise receipts (€ million) | Total Reduction (€ million) |
|--|-----|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Total excise receipts for 2017 | | €1,220 | |
| Effect of reduction in consumption of: | 10% | €1,098 | €122 |
| | 15% | €1,037 | €183 |
| | 20% | €976 | €244 |
| | 25% | €915 | €305 |

In reality there are a large number of interacting variables which could cause the above figures to be either higher or lower. In terms of broader impacts on the economy, different studies have sought to quantify the costs of alcohol misuse to society as well as studies which have sought to quantify the benefits to the economy derived from establishments and venues which are licensed to sell alcohol.

Tax Appeals Commission

102. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of cases heard by the Tax Appeals Commission, TAC, in each of the months from September to December 2017 and January 2018; the number of cases which were heard in 2017 in which adjudications have not been issued; the number of open appeals awaiting hearing; if the analysis of the cases heard by the TAC in 2017 by tax head will be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7915/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Tax Appeals Commission (TAC) is an independent statutory body tasked with managing appeals in relation to the adjudication of tax disputes. The Commission was established on 21 March 2016 following the commencement of the Finance (Tax Appeals) Act 2015. The following table outlines the number of cases heard from September, 2017 to January, 2018, by tax type and the number of cases heard in 2017 but awaiting determination:

| Appeals | | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| Appeals Heard - 2017 | | | |
| Month | No. of Appeals Heard | Tax type | No. of Cases awaiting Determination |
| Jan | 5 | IT, CT, Customs and Excise and VAT | 4 |
| Feb | 7 | IT, CT, CGT and Artist's Exemption | 5 |
| Mar | 3 | IT, CT, VRT | 1 |
| May | 9 | IT, CT, VAT, CGT and Customs & Excise | 7 |
| Jun | 6 | IT, VAT, CGT, CAT and Customs & Excise | 5 |
| Jul | 1 | IT | 0 |
| Aug | 2 | IT | 0 |
| Sep | 6 | IT, LPT | 0 |
| Oct | 3 | IT, VRT and Stamp Duty | 1 |
| Nov | 7 | IT, CAT, VRT | 2 |
| Dec | 2 | CT, VRT | 1 |
| Appeals Heard - 2018 | | | |
| Month | No. of Appeals Heard | Tax type | No. of Cases awaiting Determination |
| Jan | 1 | IT | 0 |

In addition to the above appeals heard in 2017, the TAC also held 89 Case Management Conferences (CMCs) relating to 575 appeals. A CMC is an informal hearing, at which parties to the appeal are directed to attend, with a view to assisting all parties reaching a settlement or agreement more expeditiously, without the need to conduct a formal hearing. As a result of these CMCs, 38 appeals were closed, a further 33 were withdrawn or settled and approximately 350 are currently being adjudicated on, without the need for a formal hearing. The TAC is also

planning to move to new premises in 2018. This should facilitate the conduct of multiple hearings of all natures, occurring parallel, and should significantly increase the number of determinations and settled appeals, in 2018. In relation to all such matters, I am advised that the TAC anticipates there will be more detail about the appeals on hand and the process of dealing with them, in its Annual Report, which will be produced in March.

Since the establishment of the Tax Appeals Commission 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 but this does not mean that each appeal will require a hearing. Quite often, settlements are reached between Appellants and the Revenue Commissioners when statements of cases have been shared and discussed. As mentioned above, Case Management Conferences have proved very successful in settling appeals and there should be more detail about these, in the forthcoming Annual Report of the Commission.

The Deputy may also note that the TAC have informed me that in 2017, 26 determinations on appeals were made, but the TAC closed a further 569 cases without the need for a hearing, by way of Case Management Conferences and other means.

Insurance Industry Regulation

103. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Finance when forms A and B ceased to be a valid registration form for IIA firms authorised to undertake insurance mediation before the commencement of the European Communities Regulations 2005; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7920/18]

104. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Finance when form A and B ceased to be valid registration forms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7921/18]

105. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of IIA firms authorised to undertake insurance mediation before the commencement of the IMD regulations; and the firms currently registered and those that were registered with forms A and B. [7922/18]

106. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of IIA firms authorised to undertake insurance mediation before the commencement of the IMD regulations that are currently registered and were registered under the current registration process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7923/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 103 to 106, inclusive, together.

I am advised by the Central Bank of Ireland (the Bank) that on 15 February 2007, it issued correspondence to firms authorised under the Investment Intermediaries Act, 1995 (as amended) (IIA) advising them of their requirement to register under the European Communities (Insurance Mediation) Regulations 2005 (IMR). This registration process involved the completion and submission of an appropriate registration form; Form A for those firms authorised under Section 10 of the IIA, or Form B for those firms previously deemed to be an authorised firm under the IIA.

Two subsequent letters were issued by the Bank to firms who did not return Forms A or B; on 11 February 2008 and again on 4 March 2010. The March 2010 letter provided the final opportunity for IIA authorised entities, providing insurance mediation, to avail of this registration

process. Therefore, Forms A and B ceased to be valid registration forms when firms did not reply to the Bank's correspondence of March 2010.

Since then, all firms wishing to be registered under the IMR have been required to follow the application process which is outlined on the Central Bank's website.

I have also been advised by the Bank that there were approximately 2,500 IIA firms authorised to undertake insurance mediation before the commencement of the IMR. There are currently 2,615 firms registered as Insurance & Reinsurance Intermediaries under the IMR. The Bank has informed me that it does not have figures available on how many of these firms were registered by completing Form A or Form B and how many were registered under the current registration process.

The register of insurance and reinsurance intermediaries maintained under the IMR includes the names of firms and the dates that they were registered with the Central Bank and it is available at this link <http://registers.centralbank.ie/DownloadsPage.aspx>.

Financial Services Sector

107. **Deputy Hildegarde Naughton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of regulated financial services providers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7924/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank of Ireland regulates more than 10,000 firms providing financial services in Ireland and overseas (according to its most recent Annual Performance Report 2016-2017 published in April 2017, the Central Bank regulates 10,042 firms).

The types of firms regulated include Brokers/Retail Intermediaries, Bureaux de Change, Credit Institutions, Credit Servicing Firms, Credit Unions, Debt Management Firms, Electronic Money Institutions, Funds, Funds Service Providers, Insurance & Reinsurance, Investment Firms, Moneylenders, Money Transmission Businesses, Payment Institutions, Retail Credit & Home Reversion Firms, and Securities Markets.

The Central Bank's objective is to ensure financial stability, consumer protection and market integrity. To do this, it has a range of regulatory powers in the areas of authorisation, supervision and enforcement. Regulation is undertaken through risk-based supervision, underpinned by a credible threat of enforcement with the objective of ensuring financial stability, consumer protection and market integrity.

The Central Bank of Ireland's Registers contains individual registers for all financial service providers and collective investment schemes regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland. Please see website: <http://registers.centralbank.ie/>.

Insurance Compensation Fund

108. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Finance the status of outstanding compensation claims for persons (details supplied); when outstanding compensation claims will be settled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7925/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In relation to the former customers of Setanta Insurance, the Deputy will know that Setanta was placed into liquidation by the Malta Financial Services Authority on 30 April 2014. As it was a Maltese incorporated company, the

liquidation is being carried out under Maltese law.

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

The Deputy will also be aware of my decision in principle that the State will ensure that Setanta third party claimants are compensated in full, which was announced on 30 January. The Department of Finance is now working through the detailed arrangements to implement this decision, which is likely to require legislative change. In this regard, the next step is to give consideration as to whether there is any state aid or other legal issue associated with the proposed approach. The Department is currently working with the Attorney General's Office on this issue and once the position is clarified I can give an indication of the likely timeline for payment, including the payment of the additional 35% to those who have settled their claims and have already received compensation of 65% of their claim subject to the limits outlined above.

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

No date has been fixed for the next payment from the ICF, but the Liquidator has informed me that preparatory work is underway in respect of some 275 claims to the value of c €5.8m, with a view to the Accountant to the High Court making an application before the end of March.

It is important to note that only claims which have been settled can be included in applications to the High Court for payment from the ICF. The process of settling claims is still ongoing and is subject in some cases to complex negotiations between all relevant parties. It is hoped that by the State taking steps to ensure that third party claimants are compensated in full, this will encourage the settlement of all outstanding claims as quickly as possible.

NAMA Operations

109. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Finance if he will raise with the National Asset Management Agency, NAMA, the development for commercial use of the land used by a club (details supplied) for its playing pitches; his views on whether NAMA is delivering on its social responsibilities to the community; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7932/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy will be aware that NAMA does not own or manage properties. NAMA acquired loans and the properties securing those loans continue to be managed by their legal owners or, in the case of enforcement, by duly appointed insolvency practitioners, who are responsible for the management of the properties and for decisions regarding future strategy for the properties. Under Section 10 of the NAMA Act 2009, NAMA is required to obtain the best achievable financial return for the State from its acquired loans and the properties that secure its loans. As Minister for Finance, I have no role in respect of NAMA's commercial operations or decisions.

In this instance, I am advised that the lands referred to by the Deputy are currently under the control of a receiver. Prior to the receiver's appointment, I am advised that Tyrrellstown GAA Club entered into a temporary, informal agreement with the property owner. This informal agreement enabled the club to use the lands on a temporary basis, free of charge. It was expected that community playing fields developed by Fingal County Council would cater for

the needs of sports clubs in the Tyrrellstown area, and I understand that this agreement with Tyrrellstown GAA Club was always accepted by the club as being no more than a temporary arrangement until such time as the owner of the land – in this case, the receiver – determined the ultimate strategy for the land concerned.

I am also advised that following the appointment of a receiver over the lands, the receiver sought to regularise the existing informal arrangement by way of a formal licence agreement. A draft licence agreement was forwarded to the club in October 2017, but as yet, the club has not responded to repeated contacts from the receiver to finalise this agreement.

I am advised that the lands the club currently occupy are zoned for mixed-use development, not for amenity purposes. As a result, I understand it will not be possible for the club to remain in this location on a long-term basis. I am advised that as part of the zoning process for the Tyrrellstown area, the property owner ceded land comprising 60 acres to Fingal County Council for use as amenity space and school sites, and I understand that it is the responsibility of the Council to develop playing fields within this area in line with its original arrangement with the land owner.

Tax Exemptions

110. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Finance if there is an exemption from capital acquisitions tax in a scenario (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7942/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am informed by Revenue that for gift tax purposes, the relationship between the person who provides the gift (i.e. the disponent) and the person who receives the gift (i.e. the beneficiary) determines the maximum amount known as the “Group threshold” below which gift tax does not arise.

There are three separate Group thresholds based on the relationship of the beneficiary to the disponent. The Group A threshold (currently €310,000) applies, inter alia, where the beneficiary is a child (including adopted child, step-child and certain foster children) or minor child of a deceased child of the disponent. The Group B threshold (currently €32,500) applies where the beneficiary is a brother, sister, a nephew, a niece or lineal ancestor or lineal descendant of the disponent. The Group C threshold (currently €16,250) applies in all other cases.

Any prior gift or inheritance received by a beneficiary since 5 December 1991 from within the same Group threshold is aggregated for the purposes of determining whether any tax is payable on a benefit. Where a person receives gifts or inheritances which are in excess of their relevant tax free threshold, CAT at a rate of 33% applies on the excess over the tax free threshold.

There are no exemptions from CAT for the gifting of a site. The gift tax that would be payable in the circumstances set out by the Deputy would depend on the value of the site in question, how the benefit is distributed among the beneficiaries and whether each beneficiary had received previous gifts or inheritances within his or her relevant Group threshold. The daughter’s partner would be in the Group C threshold even if he was married to her, as he is not a relative of the disponent under Groups A or B.

There is an exemption from capital gains tax where an individual transfers a site to his or her child to enable the child to build a house on the site to be occupied by that child as his or her only or main residence. In order to qualify for the exemption, the value of the site must not exceed €500,000 and the area of the site must not exceed 0.4047 hectare (1 acre).

Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland

111. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the actions he is taking to increase the rate of credit lending to small and medium enterprises, SMEs, via the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland; the level of take up from the fund by SMEs at 31 December 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7986/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the goal of Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) is to facilitate and encourage the availability of appropriately priced funding to SMEs on more flexible terms than has been available in recent times on the Irish market. The strategic mission of the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) is to deliver effective financial supports to Irish SMEs that address failures in the Irish credit market, while driving competition and innovation and ensuring the efficient use of available EU resources. The SBCI achieves this aim through the provision of low cost liquidity and risk sharing activities supporting the provision of appropriately priced, flexible funding to SMEs.

The SBCI uses an on-lending model. This means it does not lend directly to SMEs, rather the SBCI channels funds through partners, known as on-lenders. These on-lenders are both banks and non-banks finance providers. Since March 2015, to the end of December 2017, the SBCI has supported loans totalling €925 million to 22,928 Irish SMEs employing 119,533 people and operating in all sectors of the Irish economy, including agriculture, food, retail, healthcare, transport and manufacturing.

The SBCI expects to announce further on-lenders in 2018. In this regard, the SBCI is actively engaging with potential future on-lenders, in particular non-bank finance providers. This will allow the SBCI to broaden its distribution capability and market coverage. Entering in to agreements with on-lending partners is subject to a robust due diligence process by the SBCI to ensure any risks to SMEs, European funding partners and Irish taxpayers are sufficiently mitigated.

The SBCI is working to develop more innovative products, such as the Agricultural Cash-flow Support Loan Scheme and the Brexit Loan Scheme I announced in Budget 2017 and Budget 2018 respectively. Additionally, the SBCI is also continuing to work on a number of other initiatives, including the continued use of guarantees and risk sharing schemes to support lending by finance providers. These aim to address recognised market failures.

The Deputy can rest assured that the SBCI is working to develop a more diverse range of on-lenders and innovative products in 2018 to meet the evolving requirements of the SME finance market and contribute to a growing and sustainable economy.

European Fund for Strategic Investments

112. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the potential investment projects his Department put forward with regard to the task force report for the European Fund for Strategic Investments. [7990/18]

113. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Finance the progress being made in securing funding for potential investment projects under the European Fund for Strategic Investments; the projects that have been approved for funding in each Department; the projects put forward to his Department for inclusion in its task force report to the EFSI, in tabular form; and his views on whether they are still in contention for funding. [7991/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 112 and 113 together.

I take it that the Deputy is referring to the European Commission - European Investment Bank (EIB) - Member State Special Task Force to develop an Investment project pipeline for the EU in the Autumn of 2014.

The purpose of that exercise was to compile a list of potential investment projects across Member States, in order to quantify the investment need across the EU following the economic and financial crisis. The work of the Task Force informed the development of the EU's "Juncker Plan" which included the legislative proposal for the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), launched in November of that year.

Ireland, along with all other Member States, submitted a list of potential projects for inclusion in the Task Force's final report. That list which includes both public and private projects was compiled by the Department of Finance in very close coordination with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, given their responsibility for controlling public capital expenditure. The list was based on submissions from Departments with responsibility for particular sectors requiring investment, both public and private. The list, as noted by Government before submission, did not have any overall assessment or prioritisation of the projects and was not a national set of project applications. It was more accurately a contribution to an EU-wide scoping exercise to gauge the level of potential projects, during the 2015-2017 period, should investment resources become available.

The Task Force's final report was published in December 2014 and is available at <http://www.eib.org/infocentre/press/releases/all/2014/2014-277-investment-offensive-for-europe-eu-task-force-identifies-2-000-potential-projects-worth-eur1-3-trillion.htm>.

Since the EFSI Regulation's enactment in July 2015, it has been possible for any project promoter, either public or private, to engage with the EIB regarding the possibility of receiving loans or guarantees under EFSI for particular projects.

In general, Government Departments have existing relationships with the EIB so it has been a matter for each Department concerned to advance the projects in coordination with the Government's Capital Plan as coordinated by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The Department of Finance has no role in assessing projects either public or private which may be the subject of applications for EFSI loans/guarantees.

In this way, EFSI is providing an important additional funding possibility alongside other possibilities such as the EIB's normal lending, the State's borrowings through the NTMA and other mechanisms such as PPPs and off-balance sheet vehicles. It should be remembered that each EFSI loan entered into by the State pre-commits funding for the repayment of such loans, and has to be considered in the context of the expenditure benchmark under the EU's fiscal rules.

Since inception, Ireland has seen the main potential beneficiaries of EFSI as being in the private sector including through PPP companies. In this regard, I am pleased that the Department of Health's Primary Health Care Centres PPP project has successfully drawn down EFSI funds. In addition, the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) has successfully engaged with European Financial Instruments such as the COSME and the InnovFin Guarantee Programme, both of which are made available under the EFSI SME Window. These support the financing needs of SMEs and ensure that there is an adequate supply of affordable and appropriate credit to meet their needs.

I can inform the Deputy that there is a publicly available list of Irish projects which have been approved for EFSI support by the EIB which is available on the EIB website at: <http://www.eib.europa.eu/efsi/efsi-projects/index.htm?c=IE&se>. The list can be viewed according to each Member State and I would ask the Deputy to be aware that the Irish list contains both private and public sector projects, and it also includes cross-border projects between Irish entities and entities in other Member States.

Pension Provisions

114. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the details of the Revenue Commissioners investigation into claims that many pensioners who bought an annuity with a fixed cost of living increase or escalator have not been paid the pension amount they are entitled to; if the investigation will deal with claims that insurers and pension providers may have held funds in reserve and not paid them out on the death of the pensioner; the number and value of pensions potentially involved in the probe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8015/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The legislation governing the tax treatment of pensions is contained in Part 30 of, and Schedules 23 to 23C to, the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. In addition, the Revenue Pensions Manual gives general guidance on, among other things, how this legislation is to be applied.

Revenue rules in relation to “Increases of Pensions in Payment” are set out in Chapter 6.8 of the Revenue Pensions Manual. These rules allow a pension in the course of payment to be increased up to the level of the maximum allowable at retirement (after deducting the annuity value of any pension exchanged for a lump sum benefit or allocated to a spouse, civil partner or dependant). For example, depending on service, the maximum pension an individual can receive at normal retirement age is 2/3rds of final remuneration. However, if the rules of the pension scheme allow, an employee may elect to commute part of the pension for a lump sum. Any such election will cause the amount of the pension in payment to be reduced.

Guaranteed increases of a pension in payment under Chapter 6.8 of the Revenue Pensions Manual may be made by using either of the following formulae-

- a fixed increase of not more than 3% per annum compound, or
- an increase linked to the Consumer Price Index, or another similar agreed index.

The purpose of these rules is to maintain the real value of pension payments and consequently these rules allow for the real value of pensions in payment to be maintained over the course of a pensioner’s lifetime. The rules in question have been in existence for over 30 years.

I understand that in the past few days there have been reports to the effect that some pension providers are not “paying out” on what are known as 5pc escalators (that is, a fixed yearly increase of 5% in the amount of pension payments) in cases where the increase had been paid for at the time the pension was purchased.

I am informed by Revenue that it is currently engaging with the pensions industry in order to establish the facts surrounding this issue, the extent of the issue, and whether the practice is in line with pension tax legislation and with published Revenue practice in this area. Revenue’s enquiry will include the issues raised by the Deputy. However, as the enquiry has only started within the last few days, the details the Deputy has requested with regard to the number of individuals affected and the amounts involved is not yet available.

Bank Debt Restructuring

115. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the details of the proposed loan portfolio sale by a bank (details supplied); the nature of the loans concerned; the number and book value of the loans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8017/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware non-performing loans (NPL's) remain at an elevated level across the European banking system and addressing this issue is one of the key priorities for the Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM). In Ireland significant progress has been made across the banking sector in reducing the level of NPLs since the financial crisis. Despite this progress, the level of NPLs in the Irish banking sector remains well above the European average.

Hence the SSM has tasked the management and board of each institution with developing and implementing a strategy to address this challenge. In recent years banks have introduced multiple engagement channels to facilitate customers, including those who are reluctant to engage directly with them. Having exhausted these initiatives, if meaningful engagement is not forthcoming from customers or where affordability does not exist or cannot be established, the bank may be left with no option but to look at alternative solutions. These could, as a last resort, include the sale of the loan.

The Deputy will be further aware that I have no role in the day-to-day commercial and operational decisions of any of the banks' in which the State has a shareholding. Under the Relationship Framework Agreements (RFA) the disposal of loans is a commercial decision for the management and Board of each individual institution.

I have received the following response from the bank:

“For commercial reasons the bank is unable to outline any details in relation to specific loan sales at this stage.

AIB has reduced its impaired loans to c. €7.3bn from a peak of c. €29bn over the past three years. During this period some impaired portfolios were sold and case by case restructurings continued.

The reduction was achieved primarily by working through loans on a case by case basis. AIB remains focused on reducing impaired loans to a level more in line with normalised European peer levels and will continue to implement sustainable solutions for customers who engage with the bank where feasible. The bank has c.1,500 people continuing to work in this area and they are supporting and finding solutions for customers.

AIB continues to review all options in relation to reducing impaired loans including further sales”.

Bank Debt Restructuring

116. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the progress a bank (detail supplied) has made in selling non-performing loans; the number and names of the bundles of loans set to be sold; the type of loans contained within each bundle; the value of each bundle; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8045/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I can confirm for the Deputy that I have been informed of permanent tsb's decision to launch a sale process involving a portfolio of non-

performing loans. This transaction was confirmed publicly by the bank earlier this week and has been dubbed Project Glas. This decision is being taken to help reduce the bank's high level of non-performing loans and is a move prompted by SSM regulatory requirements.

As I cannot interfere in the day to day operations of the bank nor the interaction with its regulator, these are decisions for the management and board of the bank and do not require my consent. Should the portfolio sale process reach an advanced stage, and if it is of a material scale, I would expect to be formally consulted under the bank's Relationship Framework.

I understand that the vast majority of the loans for sale are in deep arrears including many that have not engaged with the bank in recent years. However as the proposed transaction is commercially sensitive, and I must respect stock exchange Market Abuse regulations, it would not be appropriate for me to provide any further commentary on the matter at this point.

While loan disposals are regrettable, as Minister for Finance I am conscious of the need for the bank to continue on its path to recovery. Permanent tsb is a very important part of the Irish banking sector and hence the economy, with over 1 million customers, €21bn of mortgage loans (gross) and €17bn of customer deposits. The bank also employs c. 2,500 staff.

Stamp Duty

117. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated revenue to be received from non-residential construction stamp duty in each of the years 2019 to 2021; the estimated number of transactions in each of these years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8046/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised that, while forecasts for 2019 to 2021 are not available, Revenue provide estimates of receipts for the current Budget year. Revenue's estimates for Stamp Duty from non-residential property transactions 2018 are based on receipts for previous years, as well as impacts of earlier policy changes and assessment of significant once-off transactions that are not expected to reoccur on a regular basis. These estimates are produced on a conservative and prudent basis.

I am informed by Revenue it is estimated that Stamp Duty receipts from non-residential property for 2018 will be in the region of €600 million. An estimate for the number of transactions is not available.

Tax Data

118. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated cost of the increase in the standard rate tax band from budget 2018 in each of the years 2019, 2020 and 2021; the estimated number of persons to pay the marginal rate in each of these years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8047/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The standard rate cut off point increased by €750 in Budget 2018 for all earners, e.g. from €33,800 to €34,550 for single individuals and from €42,800 to €43,550 for married one earner couples.

As published in Budget documentation, at the time of Budget 2018 it was estimated that the first year (i.e. 2018) cost of the increase would be €132 million, and that the full-year cost of the measure (applying from 2019 on) would be c.€152 million.

The Post-Budget 2018 Ready Reckoner published by the Revenue Commissioners shows (on page 3) the estimated number of taxpayer units paying tax at the standard and marginal rates in 2018: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/ready-reckoner.pdf>. Estimates for the number of taxpayer units paying tax at the marginal rate in 2019 (and beyond) are not available.

Data contained in the Ready Reckoner are estimates for 2018, using actual data for the year 2015 (the latest year for which data are available) adjusted as necessary for income, self-employment and employment trends in the interim. They are provisional and may be revised.

Government Bonds

119. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the NTMA's plans to raise funds from the market for the remainder of 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021; the detail of the estimated value to be raised in each of these years; the estimated interest on these bonds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8048/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy may be aware, last December the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) announced that it planned to issue €14 - €18 billion of Government bonds over the course of 2018.

It has already issued €5.25 billion of benchmark bonds so far this year. This is one third of the mid-way point of the €14 - €18 billion range.

The volume of new bond issuance required in the years 2019 – 2021 will depend on a whole range of factors. These include the Exchequer Borrowing Requirement (EBR), the volume of maturing debt that needs to be refinanced, targeted cash balances and funding from other sources such as short-term paper and State Savings products.

As is customary, the NTMA will, in December of each year, announce its planned bond funding range for the following year.

Owing to the pre-emptive action taken in recent years, the expected volume of new debt issuance required to refinance maturing debt in the coming years is considerably lower than it was three years ago.

The refinancing requirement over the period 2018 – 2020 has effectively been halved.

Through the early repayment of IMF and Swedish and Danish bilateral loans together with the early buyback and switching of near term maturing bonds for longer maturity bonds the 2018 – 2020 refinancing requirement has been reduced by some €16 billion, from €60 billion to €44 billion. Furthermore, reflecting the NTMA strategy of pre-funding, Exchequer cash balances stood at over €17 billion at the end of January.

The interest on the debt to be issued in the coming years cannot be predicted with certainty. However, by lowering our refinancing needs to such an extent, we have effectively taken out insurance and reduced our sensitivity to higher interest rates.

Government Bonds

120. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the impact on the interest rate on Government bonds of the European Central Bank halting its quantitative easing pro-

gramme; the impact on same of the ECB reversing its quantitative easing programme by selling €10 billion worth of bonds per month; the impact on same of the ECB raising interest rates by 0.25%, 0.75% and 1% respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8049/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Having already been reduced in size twice, Quantitative Easing (QE) is now scheduled to run until at least September 2018. This was confirmed by the European Central Bank (ECB) at its most recent Governing Council meeting in January, when it stated that net asset purchases under the Programme are intended to run until the end of September 2018, or beyond if necessary. The Governing Council also repeated its expectation that key ECB interest rates will remain at their present levels for an extended period of time, and well past the horizon of the net asset purchases.

While it is not possible to predict the future path of ECB monetary policy or interest rates, the strategy of the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) in recent years has been to take advantage of the favourable market conditions for sovereign issuers wherever possible. Through taking pre-emptive action over the past three years, it has significantly improved our debt redemption profile in the coming years and lowered our debt interest bill.

The refinancing requirement over the period 2018 – 2020 has effectively been halved.

Through the early repayment of IMF and Swedish and Danish bilateral loans together with the early buyback and switching of near term maturing bonds for longer maturity bonds the 2018 – 2020 refinancing requirement has been reduced by some €16 billion, from €60 billion to €44 billion. Furthermore, reflecting the NTMA strategy of pre-funding, Exchequer cash balances stood at over €17 billion at the end of January.

In addition, the accelerated buy-back and replacement of Floating Rate Notes from the Central Bank of Ireland also locks in current interest rates.

These actions reduce refinancing risk for the Exchequer and offer insurance against the possibility of interest rate increases in the coming years.

Finally, I should also mention the positive impact these actions have had on the cost of servicing our National debt. The interest bill, which was as high as €7.5 billion as recently as 2014, fell to just under €6.1 billion last year.

Flood Risk Management

121. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the OPW has included in the flood defence proposal the major pinch point at Plassey along the river Shannon; if not, the reason therefor; his views on whether this will mean that the Springfield flooding will deteriorate by increasing the flow of the river Shannon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7839/18]

122. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the OPW last met with the Shannon co-ordination group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7840/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 121 and 122 together.

The Shannon Flood Risk State Agency Co-ordination Working Group was established in early 2016 by the Government across all of the State Agencies involved with the River Shan-

non. The Group is building on the existing work and commitment of all the State Agencies involved in flood risk and continues to enhance the ongoing co-ordination and co-operation between members.

The most recent meeting of the Group was on 23 October 2017, at which the Group decided to progress the development of a proposal for the removal of a series of pinchpoints or constrictions in the navigation channel between Meelick Weir and Athlone, in the Callows area. Constrictions on other stretches of the Shannon, such as that near Plassey are not included in this particular proposal. However, the Group has discussed and is currently considering issues in relation to the Lower Shannon.

The Callows proposal is currently being developed by OPW and Waterways Ireland and requires a hydraulic analysis, environmental assessment under the appropriate legislation and will be subject to planning. The required planning process would be a matter for Waterways Ireland. As part of the development of this proposal, the potential impact on flows will be assessed to ensure that any works do not have a negative impact further downstream. The proposal is due to be discussed further at the next meeting of the Group in late March.

Flood Relief Schemes Applications

123. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if a person (details supplied) will be assisted with ongoing flooding issues in view of the fact that Limerick City and County Council and the Ombudsman have failed to resolve same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7930/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Local flooding issues are, in the first instance, a matter for each local authority to investigate and address. They may carry out flood alleviation works from their own resources or apply to the Office of Public Works, OPW, for funding under the minor flood mitigation works and coastal protection scheme. The purpose of this scheme is to provide funding to local authorities to undertake minor flood mitigation works or studies to address localised flooding and coastal protection problems within their administrative areas. Any application received will be considered in accordance with the scheme eligibility criteria, including a requirement that any measures are cost beneficial. Details of this scheme are on the OPW website, www.opw.ie

National Educational Psychological Service Data

124. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of educational psychologists in posts, by county, in tabular form; the number of vacancies that are unfilled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7974/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware my Department's National Educational Psychological Service, NEPS, provides educational psychological support to all primary and post-primary schools. This involves direct support in the event of a critical incident, access to national and regional support and development work to build school capacity to support students, access to a NEPS psychologist for responses to queries arising, and access to individual pupil casework via a NEPS psychologist or through the scheme for the commissioning of psychological assessments, SCPA.

I can inform the Deputy that during 2017 my Department worked actively with the Public

Appointments Service, PAS, to fill 11 NEPS psychologist vacancies nationally from a recruitment panel established for this purpose and to recruit an additional 11 psychologists allowed in Budget 2017 expanding NEPS overall numbers to 184 w.t.e posts.

I can further inform the Deputy that currently, there are four vacant posts. Candidates have been identified for two of these vacancies and start dates agreed, the remaining two vacancies are being pursued with PAS. I intend to fill these two vacancies as soon as possible.

In relation to the Deputy's question I can clarify that NEPS psychologists are not, per se, assigned by county but work with a regional and local office structure serving the needs of schools in their immediate vicinity. I attach therefore for the Deputy's information a breakdown of NEPS staff count, headcount and whole-time equivalent, by region and office location along with the sites of the current vacancies.

The Deputy may be aware also under the provisions of Budget 2018 that NEPS psychologist numbers will expand by another ten posts from the start of the new academic year. Plans for the filling of these posts are currently being developed by my Department.

NEPS Staffing Count by Region 14/2/2018

| NEPS Region | Office | Head Count | W.T.E. (*) | Vacancy |
|----------------------------|------------------------|------------|------------|---------|
| Dublin (Nth.) | Clondalkin Office | 6 | 5.8 | |
| | James Joyce St. Office | 23 | 20.8 | |
| Dublin (Sth.)/Mid Leinster | Dun Laoghaire Office | 17 | 16.5 | |
| | Clondalkin Office | 6 | 5.8 | 1 |
| | Naas Office | 10 | 8.5 | 1 |
| Mid-Munster | Clonmel Office | 5 | 4.6 | |
| | Cork Office | 22 | 19.0 | 1 |
| N-East | Cavan Office | 5 | 4.8 | |
| | Drogheda Office | 10 | 8.2 | 1 |
| | Navan Office | 7 | 6.4 | |
| N-West | Letterkenny Office | 8 | 6.8 | |
| | Mullingar Office | 8 | 7.9 | |
| | Sligo Office | 4 | 3.4 | |
| S-East | Kilkenny Office | 7 | 6.5 | |
| | Portlaoise Office | 5 | 4.9 | |
| | Waterford Office | 6 | 5.6 | |
| | Wexford Office | 7 | 6.3 | |
| South West | Ennis Office | 7 | 6.4 | |
| | Limerick Office | 10 | 9.0 | |
| | Tralee Office | 6 | 5.8 | |
| West | Castlebar Office | 6 | 6.0 | |
| | Galway Office | 12 | 11.3 | |
| | Roscommon Office | 2 | 1.8 | |
| No Region | Head Office Dublin | 2 | 2.0 | |
| | | | | |
| Grand Total | | 201 | 184.1 | 4 |

(*) Whole-time Equivalent (w.t.e.) taking into account effect of work-sharing and parental leave

Apprenticeship Data

125. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprenticeship programmes in operation. [7826/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): There are currently 34 apprenticeships in operation in Ireland, which includes nine new consortia-led apprenticeships recently developed in areas such as hospitality, insurance, accounting and financial services. Two further programmes in ICT, network engineer and software developer, have been validated by Quality and Qualifications Ireland, QQI, and will have their first intake of apprentices in the coming months. Further new apprenticeships are to be submitted for validation to QQI shortly and, subject to successful validation, are expected to get underway in 2018.

In addition, following a second call for new apprenticeship proposals in 2017, a further 26 new programmes have been approved for further development into national apprenticeships. These programmes span a wide range of skills and sectors including construction, engineering, horticulture and agriculture. It is estimated that the development process will take between 12 and 15 months.

Schools Building Projects Status

126. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the school building project at a school (details supplied); the current stage of this project; when it will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7831/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Following the appointment of a replacement architect for the major building project at the school referred to by the Deputy, the project has completed Stage 1 of architectural planning and has been authorised to proceed to complete stage 2A, developed design stage, since January 2018.

Stage 2A allows for development of the design and to accurately cost the option agreed with the client to a stage where the project is fully cost planned and can be prepared to lodge for statutory approvals

On receipt of the completed Stage 2A report, my Department will review the submission.

Once this review is complete my Department will be in contact with the Board of Management to advise as to the next steps.

Teacher Training Provision

127. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to introduce a one year teaching higher diploma postgraduate qualification for teaching primary or secondary students for those who have a non-educational undergraduate degree; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7850/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Initial teacher education, ITE, for primary and post-primary teachers is facilitated through a range of concurrent, undergraduate, and consecutive, postgraduate, programmes.

The Teaching Council is the statutory body that sets and upholds the standards for entry to the teaching profession. All ITE programmes that lead to registration with the Council must have professional accreditation from the Council.

Changes to ITE were proposed in the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy Among Children and Young People 2011-2020 and incorporated into the Teaching Council's policy paper on the continuum of teacher education and initial teacher education: criteria and guidelines for programme providers. These changes included the reconfiguration of the course content and increased duration for both primary and post-primary ITE programmes: undergraduate ITE programmes must now be a minimum of four years duration and postgraduate programmes are of two years duration.

The Teaching Council is reviewing the impact of the reconfigured programmes as well as the criteria and guidelines for programme providers.

At present there are no plans to introduce a one year higher diploma postgraduate route to qualification as a teacher.

Gender Equality

128. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the extent to which each of the recommendations of the report of the expert group, Higher Education Authority, HEA, national review of gender equality in Irish higher education institutions, has been implemented in each institution, in tabular form; the timeframe for the implementation of each recommendation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7851/18]

129. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the consideration given to a retrospective analysis of gender equality issues in third level institutions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7852/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 128 and 129 together.

The HEA national review of gender equality in Irish higher education institutions, which was published in June 2016, contained a list of 61 recommendations; 22 of which were for implementation by higher education institutions. None of the recommendations was mandatory. I have attached a list of these recommendations and their associated timelines for the Deputy's information.

It was envisaged that, at the end of a three year period, a full review would be undertaken and, as part of the strategic dialogue process, HEIs would be at risk of funding being withheld if they were not addressing gender inequality sufficiently.

All the Higher Education Authority funded institutions are now required to submit annual staff data disaggregated by gender, to the HEA. The first report of this data was published as part of the HEA expert group report in 2016, and a second report was published in July 2017. This data was not available prior to 2016, and there are no plans to undertake a retrospective analysis.

In light of the limited progress observed in the July 2017 data, a gender equality task force

was established in November 2017 to prepare a three year prioritised action plan. The gender equality task force will also oversee a national systems review of the recruitment and promotion policies and practices currently in place in higher education institutions, with a view to identifying good practice and highlighting areas that need improvement.

As part of both the HEA expert group report and the work of the gender equality task force, a literature review has been carried out to identify areas of best practice nationally and internationally. The gender equality task force is also building on the recommendations of the expert group, and is considering the institutional implementation of the recommendations of the 2016 HEA expert group. It is envisaged that the outcome of this work will be included in the report of the gender equality task force.

Expert Group Recommendations - Higher Education Institutions

| | Objective | Recommendations | Timeline in Report |
|-----|---|---|---|
| 1.1 | To foster gender balance in the leadership of HEIs. | At the final selection step, in the appointment process for new presidents (or equivalent), in so far as possible, the final pool of candidates will comprise an equal number of women and men. If it has not been possible to achieve gender balance at the final selection step, the interview panel will account to the governing authority or equivalent for why this was not possible. | From 2016 (including competitions already underway) |
| 1.2 | To ensure HEI leaders foster a culture of gender equality in their HEI. | In the appointment process for a new president, a requirement of appointment will be demonstrable experience of leadership in advancing gender equality. | Effective immediately |
| 1.3 | | In the appointment process for a new vice-president, a requirement of appointment will be demonstrable experience of leadership in advancing gender equality. | Effective immediately |

| | Objective | Recommendations | Timeline in Report |
|------|---|--|-----------------------|
| 1.4 | To lead cultural and organisational change in their area of responsibility | The deans and heads of schools/ department, divisional directors and section/unit managers will be responsible for integrating gender equality in all processes and decisions made. Evidence of leadership in advancing gender equality will be taken into account in appointments to these management positions | Effective immediately |
| 1.5 | To achieve gender equality in each HEI. | Each HEI will, through a publicly advertised competitive process, appoint a vice-president for equality who will be a full academic member of the executive management team and who will report directly to the president. | From 2017 |
| 1.6 | To ensure gender balance of all key decision-making bodies. | Key decision-making bodies (concerned with resource allocation, appointments and promotions) in HEIs will consist of at least 40% women and 40% men. | From 2016 |
| 1.7 | | At least 40% of the chairs of key decision-making bodies (concerned with resource allocation, appointments and promotions) across the HEI will be of each gender in any given year. It is expected that over a three year period the ratio would be 50:50 women and men chairs. | By 2018 |
| 1.8 | To provide strategic oversight of organisational processes and policies in relation to gender equality. | A gender equality sub-committee of the governing authority/body should be established. The minutes of the sub-committee will be published within the HEI. | By 2017 |
| 1.9 | To support the mainstreaming of gender equality across the HEIs | Each HEI will establish an independent, academically-led gender equality forum, chaired by the vice-president for equality and comprising staff members drawn from across the HEI with sufficient influence and motivation to effect change. | By 2017 |
| 1.10 | To enhance the provision of support for staff members with caring responsibilities. | Each HEI will establish a cross-institutional working group to develop a funded structure of family leave (inclusive of maternity, paternity, parental, adoptive, and carer's leave) and develop mandatory guidelines to underpin this. | By 2017 |

Questions - Written Answers

| | Objective | Recommendations | Timeline in Report |
|------|--|--|--------------------|
| 1.11 | To increase gender awareness among staff. | The HEI will adopt measures aimed at actively developing gender awareness among all staff. | From 2016 |
| 1.12 | To embed the gender dimension in teaching and learning and quality review processes. | The gender dimension will be fully integrated into undergraduate and postgraduate curricula.Face-to-face, unconscious bias training will be fully integrated into initial teacher training education.At departmental level, self-assessment (departmental reviews) will include consideration of the gender dimension.HEIs will include consideration of the gender dimension in the institutional quality assurance report. | Ongoing |
| 1.13 | To embed the gender dimension in research content. | Ensure that the gender dimension is integrated into all research content and provide training and support for research staff on how to do this. | Ongoing |
| 1.14 | To ensure transparent distribution of work. | Ensure HEI workload allocation models are transparent and monitored for gender bias on an annual basis.Evidence of this will be taken into account in the performance development reviews of managers/ supervisors responsible for setting staff workloads. | From 2016 |
| 1.15 | To enable gender disaggregated data-driven decision-making. | A comprehensive gender-disaggregated data collection system will be in place in every HEI. | From 2016 |
| 1.16 | To gender-proof recruitment, selection and promotion procedures and practices. | The recruitment, selection, and promotion procedures currently used, will be reviewed to ensure that they are gender-sensitive. | From 2016 |
| 1.17 | To drive change through the use of positive action interventions for academic staff. | Each HEI will introduce mandatory quotas for academic promotion, based on the flexible cascade model where the proportion of women and men to be promoted/recruited is based on the proportion of each gender at the grade immediately below. | From 2016 |
| 1.18 | To drive change at professor level through the use of positive action interventions. | A minimum of 40% women and 40% men to be full professors, at the appropriate pay scale. | Achieved by 2024 |

| | Objective | Recommendations | Timeline in Report |
|------|---|---|---|
| 1.19 | To drive change through the use of positive action interventions for non-academic staff. | At the final selection step in the appointment process for non-academic positions where the salary-scale reaches or exceeds €76,000, in so far as is possible, the final pool of candidates must comprise an equal number of women and men. If it has not been possible to achieve gender balance at the final selection step, the interview panel must account to the Governing Authority or equivalent for why this was not possible. | From 2016 (including competitions already underway) |
| 1.20 | Combat stereotyping of 'female' and 'male' roles and horizontal segregation among non-academic staff. | Overtime, achieve greater gender-balance at all career levels (pay grades) within the institution. | From 2016 |
| 1.21 | To ensure a roadmap for attainment of gender equality is developed in each institution. | Each HEI will develop and implement a gender action plan (including goals, actions and targets), which will be integrated into the institution's strategic plan and into the HEI's compacts with the HEA. | From 2016 |
| 1.22 | To support and recognise the embedding of gender equality across all aspects of the work of HEIs. | HEIs will apply for and achieve an Athena SWAN institutional award within three years. TUs will apply for and achieve an Athena Swan award within three years of being formally established. | From 2019 |

Expert Group Recommendations - Higher Education Authority

| | Objective | Recommendation | Timeline |
|-----|--|---|-----------------------|
| 2.1 | To enhance the performance management of HEI's strategic development in addressing gender inequality. | A theme on 'promoting excellence though gender equality' will be integrated into the HEI compacts. This will encompass two sections, 'organisational culture and structures' and 'supporting and advancing careers', and HEIs will be required to identify measures under both. | To be started in 2016 |
| 2.2 | To provide a comprehensive evidence base upon which to monitor the progress of HEIs in addressing gender inequality. | The HEA will establish a comprehensive database of staff in HEIs. | Ongoing |
| 2.3 | To enhance the visibility of HEIs' progress in addressing gender inequality. | Gender will be introduced into the multi-dimensional profiles of HEIs, published annually by the HEA. | Annually |
| 2.4 | To improve data collection on the composition of HEI governance and management structures. | Explicit reference will be included in the Annual Statement of Governance and Internal Control template, with regard to the composition of HEIs' governance and management structures disaggregated by gender. | From 2016 |
| 2.5 | To include gender equality in the rolling review process conducted by the HEA. | As a part of the existing rolling review process, the HEA will initiate a review of compliance in respect of equality (inclusive of gender equality). | From 2017 |
| 2.6 | To support a coordinated national approach to advancing gender equality in higher education. | A national committee to support gender equality in Irish higher education will be established. | From 2017 |
| 2.7 | To galvanise HEIs to address gender inequality. | A targeted funding stream will be established to which HEIs will be able to apply on a competitive basis to support new initiatives to foster gender equality. | From 2017 |

| | Objective | Recommendation | Timeline |
|------|---|--|----------------|
| 2.8 | To provide oversight for the implementation of the recommendations of the Expert Group. | The progress made by the HEIs in addressing gender inequality via implementation of the recommendations of the Expert Group, will be reviewed tri-annually and a report published. | From 2019 |
| 2.9 | To extend the power of visitors. | When the HEA has powers to appoint a visitor to HEIs, it should include gender equality in the visitor's brief. | As appropriate |
| 2.10 | To incentivise and recognise HEIs' progress in advancing gender equality. | The HEA will establish the Athena SWAN Charter in Ireland on a permanent basis and extend it to cover the AHSS and all staff, under the extended charter. | From 2017 |
| 2.11 | To support Irish HEIs to engage with and achieve Athena SWAN certification. | The HEA will continue to fund the national Athena SWAN Committee. | Ongoing |
| 2.12 | To internationally benchmark the 'system of promotion' in Irish HEIs. | The HEA will work with the ECU to extend the 'system of promotion' review to Irish HEIs. | In 2018 |

Expert Group Recommendations - Irish Research Funding Agencies

| | Objective | Recommendation | Timeline |
|-----|---|--|-----------|
| 3.1 | To ensure scientific excellence, the stimulation of new knowledge leading to technological innovations, by integrating gender analysis into all phases of basic and applied research. | As a pre-requisite for funding, research funding agencies will require applicants to demonstrate that they have given full consideration to any potential gender dimension in their proposed research. | From 2017 |
| 3.2 | To foster gender balance within research teams and PIs across the HEI. | Gender balance will be fostered within research teams, with the aim of ensuring that, at an institutional level, research teams and PIs are comprised of at least 40% women and 40% men. | From 2017 |

| | Objective | Recommendation | Timeline |
|-----|--|---|-----------|
| 3.3 | To minimise the effect of bias on research funding outcomes, and to ensure that women and men have similar success rates in funding calls. | All assessment panels, advisory groups, management boards, key committees, workshops, and focus-groups will comprise at least 40% of each gender. | By 2017 |
| 3.4 | | All agencies will provide face-to-face unconscious-bias training for assessment panel members. | By 2017 |
| 3.5 | | Targeted gender initiatives will be developed, informed by annual gender-disaggregated statistics and the monitoring and analysis of the gender-balance of applicants and awardees. | From 2016 |
| 3.6 | To foster gender equality in the research arena. | Research funding agencies will develop and implement gender strategies and action plans. | By 2017 |
| 3.7 | To improve the gender-base for addressing gender inequality. | Funding streams will be established to support research on gender equality. | From 2017 |
| 3.8 | To support HEIs to mainstream gender equality, improving the environment within which research is undertaken. | Within three years research-funding agencies will require HEIs to have attained an Athena SWAN Bronze Institutional award to be eligible for funding. Within seven years research-funding agencies will require HEIs to have attained an Athena SWAN Silver institutional award to be eligible for funding. | 2019-2021 |

Departmental Expenditure

130. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of capital expenditure by his Department in an area (details supplied) since January 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7855/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Total capital funding expended in the period January 2013 to December 2017 in County Wexford amounts to €90,097,522.

Details of expenditure on a district or constituency basis are only available on receipt of school names and roll numbers.

Details of all school capital works that have been funded by my Department may be viewed

on my Department's website at www.education.ie and this is updated regularly.

Schools Facilities

131. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary and post-primary schools in County Wexford that do not have a physical education or general purpose hall; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7857/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department does not have reliable information regarding the physical education or general purpose facilities in schools in County Wexford.

I also wish to advise the Deputy that the physical education curriculum has been designed on the basis that facilities in schools may vary. Many primary schools have a general purpose room and practically all schools have outdoor play areas which are used for teaching different aspects of the physical education programme. A similar situation with sports halls and outdoor facilities applies at second level. In addition, many schools use adjacent local facilities, including public parks, playing fields and swimming pools.

Schools Site Acquisitions

132. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the progress made in securing a permanent site for a school (details supplied) to accommodate the growth of the school population in 2019 and 2020. [7873/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm that the conveyancing process for the acquisition of the requisite site for the school to which the Deputy refers is at an advanced stage.

The Department has been working through some technical issues associated with the site with the assistance of the vendor and the Local Authority. These are now largely resolved and all parties are working towards the completion of this acquisition at the earliest possible date.

Once the site has been secured, a project to provide permanent accommodation for the school in question will be progressed into the architectural planning process.

Teachers' Remuneration

133. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if, in respect of the award of incremental credit to teachers at second level, relevant non-teaching experience is taken into account; if those teachers who were previously self-employed can be considered for the increment; and if not, his plans to review the provisions to allow for this. [7885/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria for the award of incremental credit to recognized post-primary teachers under Circular 29/2007 was agreed under the auspices of the Teachers Conciliation Council. This Council is comprised of representatives of teachers, school management, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the Department of Education & Skills and is chaired by an official of the Workplace Relations Commission.

The Circular provides that incremental credit may be awarded to teachers in an Oireachtas funded post for previous Relevant Non-Teaching Experience where certain conditions are met, including that the service must have been remunerated under a whole-time contract of employment. This precludes self-employment.

A teacher, whose application for the award of incremental credit in respect of relevant non-teaching service has been refused by my Department, may submit an appeal to an independent appeals board that is established by my Department in accordance with the terms of Agreed Report 10/2000 of the Conciliation Council for Teachers.

School Fees

134. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on schools charging a compulsory fee for students to participate in transition year (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7903/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): A key requirement for all recognised schools in the Free Education Scheme, is that the school does not operate a charge, in whatever form, that is in effect a mandatory fee and that is contrary to the principle of not charging fees which distinguishes schools in the Free Education Scheme from those recognised post-primary schools that have elected to charge fees.

Certain charges may, however, be legitimately requested from pupils such as:

- Payment for school books or photocopied material provided by the school where the charge is reasonable and simply reflects the true costs concerned;
- Charges for meals and refreshments provided pupils are not required to purchase same and can bring their own refreshments to school (e.g. lunchbox); or
- Services and activities provided by the school in excess of that included in the general school programme, provided the pupil can elect to avail of such services (e.g. supervised after-school study, school tours, or visits to theatres or sporting events).

While the above is not exhaustive, the key requirement is that a school does not operate a charge, in whatever form, that is in effect a mandatory fee. Voluntary contributions may be sought from parents, provided it is made clear to parents that there is no compulsion to pay and that a child's place in the school or continued enrolment is not dependant on a willingness to make a contribution.

Teacher Training Provision

135. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if competitive funding will be made available for initial teacher education in schools of education in HEIs to achieve the objectives of the STEM education policy statement 2017 to 2026. [7904/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The STEM Policy Statement and Implementation Plan, which I launched in November 2017, 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.

Achieving our goals will require a multifaceted focus, looking to increase engagement with

STEM and progress important curriculum developments, including the redevelopment of the Primary Mathematics Curriculum and introduction of Leaving Certificate Computer Science. It will also require a significant step-up in support to teachers and school leaders and encouragement of innovation in teaching methods. Implementation of STEM policy will be considered as part of the Teaching Council's review of impact of the reconfigured Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes and its Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers, which underpin all ITE. We are also looking at measures to increase the supply of STEM teachers. 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 announced that I want to double the number of places on undergraduate course to train second level teachers, particularly in areas like STEM.

While the focus of the Policy Statement is on STEM from early years through to post-primary level, there are also important developments underway in the higher education sector which support STEM Policy and highlight the importance of alignment in relation to STEM education across the entire education system.

Therefore the Deputy can be assured that every effort will be made to assist schools of education to achieve the initial teacher education objectives of the STEM policy statement.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

136. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to solve the anomaly whereby a family can qualify for family income supplement, but is unable to qualify for a student grant; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7929/18]

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

Under the terms of the student grant scheme, Family Income Supplement (FIS) is treated as an income disregard and is therefore not included in the calculation of reckonable income. It is also a qualifying payment for the special rate of grant.

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

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 by the applicant via www.studentgrantappeals.ie outlining the position to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board within the required timeframe.

Students in third-level institutions experiencing exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This Fund assists students, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Details of this fund are available from the Access Office in the

college attended.

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

School Accommodation Provision

137. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) to construct one classroom. [7938/18]

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

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

Educational Supports

138. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which he plans to support children who are attending primary and secondary schools and are identified as homeless; the supports offered to these children; the way in which these are logged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7964/18]

139. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an individual learning plan strategy to support children who are attending primary and secondary schools and identifying as homeless has been implemented; the supports offered to children; the way in which these are logged; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7965/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 138 and 139 together.

Government policy on homelessness recognises the provision of long term secure housing as the key solution to ending homelessness. The Government has sought to respond to homelessness in a variety of ways.

Homelessness is of concern to everyone. Any issue which impacts on teaching and learning outcomes in schools is a matter of concern to my Department.

A range of resources are available from my Department to support schools in dealing with identified additional educational needs, including needs which may arise for children who are experiencing homelessness.

Statistics on school attendance are collected by Tusla in accordance with Section 21 of the Education Welfare Act, 2000. The impact of homelessness on school attendance participation and retention is dealt with by Tusla's Educational Welfare Service. The Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness includes specific actions for delivery by Tusla including:

- Home School Community Liaison and School Completion staff will assist children and families experiencing homelessness to maintain regular school attendance. Children in homeless accommodation will be prioritised within the School Completion Programme for services

such as breakfast and homework clubs.

- Additional resources will be put in place to strengthen inter-agency arrangements with Tusla including family Support, Social Work and Education Welfare. Tusla will appoint specific staff to assist in accessing requisite family support and child welfare services and managing any difficulties that arise for children in relation to school participation;

- A joined-up approach will be promoted between education, health and Tusla to meet the needs of homeless families, by using the existing Children and Young People's Services Committees

- Access to free public transport will be provided for school journeys and outings away from the emergency accommodation.

The staff of schools are very sensitive to the needs of children who are experiencing disruption in their lives and make every effort to support the additional needs they experience. Where they are aware of homelessness and where it is impacting on school attendance and participation they engage closely with the Educational Welfare Service of Tusla and with the support services of my own Department and in particular those of the National Educational Psychological Service which I have strengthened in the past year.

Identification of Need and Early Intervention and Prevention Strategies are considered key components to supporting children who experience homelessness. The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) works with schools through the DES Continuum of Support framework. NEPS psychologists can provide advice and guidance to Principals and teachers in relation to individual students needs and in the development of whole school approaches to support inclusion, participation and integration.

Students facing homelessness may have the same emotional needs and learning needs as other students, but the immediacy of those needs is heightened. NEPS supports the role of the school in identifying individual needs and at a systems level in the development of a culture and environment which supports connectedness and provides structure and stability, key elements which underpin learning and opportunity.

The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) Wellbeing Team provides a comprehensive programme of supports for teachers in the delivery of the SPHE curriculum where the issue of homelessness is dealt with under the "Myself and the Wider World" strand.

DEIS is the main policy initiative of my Department to tackle educational disadvantage. DEIS Plan 2017 sets out my Department's vision for future intervention in this critical area of education policy. Schools may use DEIS supports to meet the additional identified needs that may arise for pupils experiencing homelessness.

Schools Building Projects Data

140. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the review of the programme for capital expenditure in 2018 and 2019 in the context of all schools building projects in north County Kildare; the timeframe for the progression of projects; the status and-or the stage of the process schools are at; the level of progression in projects, by school, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7969/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department's review of its programme for capital expenditure in 2018 and 2019 involving the scheduling of projects

that are advancing to construction is currently ongoing and will be concluded shortly. The overall capital allocation available to the school sector in 2018 amounts to €570 million and will be expended primarily on the provision of essential school accommodation.

My Department's capital programme continues to address the challenges posed by a rapidly-increasing school population. 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.

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. Details of such funding approved in all schools, including those in County Kildare, is available on my Department's website www.education.ie which is updated regularly.

The current status of the 29 school building projects in County Kildare that are included on my Department's 6 Year Capital Programme is outlined in the table.

Capital Programme – Major projects being progressed

| County | Roll No | School Name | School type | Status |
|---------|---------|---------------------------------------|----------------|------------------------------|
| Kildare | 16706G | St Joseph's NS, Kilcock | Primary | Stage 2B |
| Kildare | 70680U | St Conleth's VS, Newbridge | Post-Primary | Under construction |
| Kildare | 70700A | Maynooth Post Primary School | Post-Primary | Under construction |
| Kildare | 76193Q | New Maynooth Community College | Post-Primary | Under Construction |
| Kildare | 19277A | St Anne's Special School, The Curragh | Special School | Stage 2A |
| Kildare | 19675N | St Brigid's NS, Kilcullen | Primary | Completed |
| Kildare | 76194S | Naas Community College | Post-Primary | Stage 2B |
| Kildare | 76253I | Celbridge Community School | Post-Primary | Early Architectural Planning |
| Kildare | 20257C | Scoil Naomh Padraig, Celbridge | Primary | Early Architectural Planning |
| Kildare | 15957D | Rathangan BNS | Primary | Substantial completion |
| Kildare | 61702D | St Paul's Post-Primary School | Post-Primary | Stage 2B |
| Kildare | 15040T | Mercy Convent, Naas | Primary | Under construction |

| County | Roll No | School Name | School type | Status |
|---------|--------------|---|----------------|------------------------------|
| Kildare | 18288B | Scoil Mhichil Naofa, Athy | Primary | Stage 2B |
| Kildare | 20428D | Gaelscoil Mhic Aodha, Kildare Town | Primary | Under construction |
| Kildare | 19796C | St Patrick's NS, Clane | Primary | Stage 2B |
| Kildare | 15769C16707I | Scoil Eimhinn Naofa & St Peter's NS, Monasterevan | Primary | Stage 2B |
| Kildare | 17341U | Maynooth BNS | Primary | Stage 2B |
| Kildare | 17872F | St Conleth's & St Mary's, Newbridge | Primary | Stage 2B |
| Kildare | 17873H | St Conleth's Infant School | Primary | Stage 2B |
| Kildare | 17254C | St Corban's BNS | Primary | Early Architectural Planning |
| Kildare | 18988G | St Raphael's Special School | Special School | Site required |
| Kildare | 19455W | St Mark's Special School, Newbridge | Special School | Early Architectural Planning |
| Kildare | 20292E | Maynooth ETNS | Primary | Stage 2(b) |
| Kildare | 61690W | Cross & Passion, Kilcullen | Post-Primary | Early Architectural Planning |
| Kildare | 70650L | Athy Community College | Post-Primary | Early Architectural Planning |
| Kildare | 70720G | St Farnan's Post-Primary School | Post-Primary | Early Architectural Planning |
| Kildare | 13902O | Hewetson NS | Primary | Early Architectural Planning |
| Kildare | 61681V | Patrician Post-Primary, Newbridge | Post-Primary | Early Architectural Planning |
| Kildare | 61730I | St Mary's Girls Post-Primary School, Naas | Post-Primary | Early Architectural Planning |

Apprenticeship Programmes

141. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether it is proportionate on small scale micro-sized businesses and employers compared to large companies regarding remuneration obligations for the off-the-job element of craft based ap-

prenticeships as set out in correspondence (details supplied); and the number of weeks for the off-the-job element regarding remuneration obligations in each year of a four year craft and consortia led apprenticeship. [7983/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):

As the Deputy is aware, apprentices undertaking one of our craft apprenticeships are paid a training allowance, equivalent to their net take home pay on the job, by their local Education and Training Board (ETB) while attending their off-the-job training phases. During their on-the-job training they are paid a salary by a SOLAS approved employer. Craft apprenticeships are generally four years in duration and consist of seven training phases, three phases off-the-job in an educational institution and four phases on-the-job with an approved SOLAS employer. The off-the-job training phases can vary slightly depending on the apprenticeship, however, are generally up to 20 weeks during phase 2 and 10-11 weeks during phases 4 and 6.

Apprentices undertaking one of the recently developed consortia led apprenticeships are paid a salary by a SOLAS approved employer for the duration of their apprenticeship. However, unlike the craft apprenticeships, these new apprenticeships are more flexible both in terms of the delivery of the off the job training and also in their duration, ranging from two to four years.

Immigration Policy

142. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there are exceptions to the restrictions on Libyan nationals applying for visas to allow parents of Libyans legally living here to visit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7898/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I wish to advise the Deputy that certain restrictions on consideration of Irish visa applications from residents of Libya have been in place since August, 2014 due to the political and security situation in Libya. All relevant considerations including the ongoing security situation in Libya and the potential economic impact of the restrictions were taken into account when these restriction were applied.

There is provision for a small number of exceptions relating to the beef industry where applications may be accepted from persons who are known to and sponsored by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and/or An Bord Bia and who have a good travel history to Ireland, the UK or the Schengen countries. Certain applications in relation to the oil industry and which are supported by the internationally recognised Government in Libya are also considered.

The position has been kept under review by my Department. Ultimately, an appropriate balance must be struck between State security and individual applicants who wish to come here.

Taking all this into account, I recently decided that the existing approach and restrictions should continue in place for a further six month period. The position however continues to be kept under review, and I have asked my officials to consider whether there is any scope to extend the categories of applicants who may be considered for visa processing.

Parental Leave

143. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when he plans to increase parental leave from 18 to 26 weeks; his further plans to increase the age of the qualifying child from 8 to 12 years of age with this increase in entitlement; and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [8044/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):

As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for Partnership Government includes a commitment to increase paid parental leave during the first year of a child's life, as research shows that parental care is of particular importance in the first year of life. To further this commitment, the Government has established an interdepartmental working group to develop proposals to give effect to the Programme commitments. The key objectives of this group are to:

- Develop options as to the duration of the leave, the age of the eligible child, and the level of payment to be offered;
- Determine the usefulness of adopting a phased approach;
- Estimate the likely costs arising; and
- Align any proposals as much as possible with a European Commission Proposal for a Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers.

The group is currently working on a policy approach and I expect it to report with its proposals at the end of April.

The move to introduce a paid parental leave entitlement is also in keeping with the policy approach put forward by the European Commission's proposal for a work-life balance directive, which is currently under discussion at working group level under the Bulgarian Presidency of the EU.

The specific objectives of the Directive are:

- To improve access to work-life balance arrangements and;
- To increase take-up of family-related leaves and flexible working arrangements by men.

The Directive's key proposal is that parental leave should be made available to parents on a paid basis. This approach recognises that the provision of paid parental leave will be more effective and more appropriate in terms of encouraging fathers to share the caring role for their children. All the evidence shows that in parenting, what is best for children is the involvement of their fathers, in addition to their mothers, in their practical care and day to day lives.

Given that discussions are on-going at EU level and the interdepartmental working group is not due to present its proposals until later this year, the Deputy will appreciate that it would be premature at this point to signify a precise timeframe for introducing any significant changes.

The Deputy will also be aware that Deputies Roisin Shortall and Catherine Murphy have proposed a Private Members Bill, entitled Parental Leave (Amendment) Bill 2017, which provides for the extension of the existing entitlement to parental leave from 18 weeks leave to 26 weeks leave. The Government decided not to oppose this Bill at Second Stage, which took place on 8 February 2018.

I advised the House that I was available to discuss the proposal contained in the Bill with the sponsoring deputies. The Bill has been referred to the Select Committee on Justice and Equality and I have strongly suggested that the Joint Committee on Justice and Equality carry out a comprehensive legislative scrutiny on the Bill and on related issues in order to inform the debate and to allow interested stakeholders, groups and individuals to make submissions and to input to the legislative process. I look forward to engaging in future discussions on the Bill in the context of the work that is ongoing in relation to expanding paid support to parents. I have

no current plans to increase the age of the qualifying child for parental leave from eight to 12 years of age, but this is an issue that can be explored within the context of the broader discussions on parental leave, and also in terms of the Family Leave Bill, which will consolidate and update family leave legislation.

Deportation Orders

144. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No.120 of 7 December 2017, the documentary evidence that will suffice in the case of a person (details supplied) to prove their spouse is not here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7820/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the spouse of the person referred to is the subject of a valid Deportation Order made on 20 June 2002. The Deputy might wish to note that persons subject of a Deportation Order are obliged to remove themselves from the State and to remain out of the State.

Representations were received, pursuant to the provisions of section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), requesting that the Deportation Order be revoked. Following the detailed consideration of the information submitted in support of the request, including all representations made around family reunification, the Deportation Order was affirmed on 9 November 2017. If, as is claimed, the relevant party is already outside the State, then clearly the presentation requirement referred to in the Deputy's Question does not apply. However, it would be very helpful if this position could be supported by documentary evidence so that the relevant INIS and Garda National Immigration Bureau records can be updated. This documentary evidence should include official documentation which supports the claim that this individual is no longer in the State and copies of stamps in his passport indicating that he has entered another jurisdiction.

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.

Citizenship Applications

145. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason applications for citizenship are taking up to 12 months or longer to process in view of the commitments given by his Department that the processing time for such applications would be reduced to six months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7847/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): 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. All applications are examined to determine if the applicant meets the statutory conditions for naturalisation set out in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended, such as good character and lawful residence.

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 may take longer than others to process. In some instances, completing the necessary checks may take a considerable period of time.

Cases where delays in processing can arise can often be due to further documentation being required from the applicant, or payment of the required certificate fee is awaited, or the applicant has not been engaging with the office. In some instances delays can arise at the final stage of the naturalisation process, for example where additional information comes to light which requires to be considered. In other instances the applicant themselves may request that a hold be put on their application, for example where they may have returned to their country of origin for a prolonged period, to facilitate them in making arrangements to return to reside in the State, or where they have difficulty in obtaining satisfactory evidence of their identity or nationality.

The Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department has a dedicated phone helpline and email helpdesk available for all applicants interested in the progress of their application, details of which are available on the INIS website at www.inis.gov.ie.

Work Permits Eligibility

146. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there is a mechanism by which a person on a stamp two student visa can apply for a work permit when they have completed their studies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7872/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that a non-EEA student may be entitled to apply for a one year permission under the rules of the Third Level Graduate Programme having completed their studies in the State. The Third Level Graduate Programme Immigration Rules and qualifying criteria can be found at www.inis.gov.ie.

The intention of the programme is to allow legally resident Irish educated non-EEA graduates to remain in Ireland after their studies for the purpose of seeking an Employment Permit.

The issuing of Employment Permits is a matter for the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. Further information is available at: www.dbei.gov.ie.

Independent Review Mechanism

147. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he is satisfied with progress relating to the statutory inquiries underway following the IRM process; and his views on the budget and timescale for same. [7880/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy refers to five statutory inquiries established under Orders made by my predecessor on 15 May 2017. These Orders appointed a separate retired judge to conduct each Inquiry.

The Deputy will appreciate that each Inquiry is different in terms of scope and volume of documentation. While each of them was requested to report within six months, it has not proved possible to complete the inquiries within that timeframe. I have recently received update reports from each of the judges concerned regarding the progress of their respective Inquiries.

Arising from those progress reports, I recently granted extensions to the timescales of each Inquiry. I believe that it is in the interests of all involved that the inquiries be given sufficient time to examine and report on the issues in question. I now expect to receive the first of these final reports by 31 March 2018.

I believe that the resources available to these Inquiries will be sufficient to enable them to complete this work.

Independent Review Mechanism

148. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he is satisfied with the terms of reference in relation to the statutory inquiries into four deaths, following the IRM process; and his plans to amend those terms in view of concerns by some persons and the lack of clarity regarding whether recommendations will be referred to him for consideration and action following their conclusion. [7881/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy refers to cases which were the subject of review by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). In each of the four cases referred to by the Deputy, counsel of the IRM recommended that an inquiry be established to examine issues raised.

As was outlined to the Deputy in response to Question 83 of 12 July 2017, Orders establishing these inquiries under Section 42 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 were signed by my predecessor on 15 May 2017. In each case, the Order sets out the issue to be inquired into, its terms of reference and the name of the person appointed to conduct it.

The terms of reference are in line with the recommendations of IRM counsel and are in accordance with provisions of the above-mentioned Section 42. They were also the subject of consultation with the Office of the Attorney General and the Policing Authority. I am satisfied that these terms of reference are both appropriate and sufficient to allow the judges to conduct these inquiries thoroughly.

The Orders also prescribe that a report is to be made to me at the conclusion of each Inquiry. At the time of establishment of these inquiries, a timeframe of six months was set out for the submission of final reports to me. In interim reports provided to me by the judges, it was made clear that completion within that six month timeframe has not been possible. I have therefore granted appropriate extensions of time for each inquiry. I will review the contents of each report once it is to hand and consider whether any further action is warranted.

Mortgage Resolution Processes

149. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 170 of 1 February 2018, the details of the 10,000 advice and assistance services provided to distressed borrowers up to mid-January 2018 by the Abhaile scheme in terms of court circuits, numbers of vouchers provided to solicitors and the average value of the vouchers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7887/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, Abhaile is the Government's national Mortgage Arrears Resolution Service. It provides insolvent borrowers who are at risk of losing their home with a range of free expert services and supports, including professional legal and financial advice and assistance, to help them identify

and put in place solutions to their arrears, and wherever possible, to remain in their homes.

Up to 19th of January 2018, Abhaile issued 7,983 vouchers for free professional financial advice and assistance from a personal insolvency practitioner, and 2,177 vouchers for free legal advice and assistance from a solicitor. A substantial number of other borrowers were assisted under other free Abhaile services, including those receiving financial advice and assistance from Dedicated Mortgage Arrears Advisers working with MABS (the Money Advice and Budgeting Service), or helped by duty solicitors, or by MABS court mentors, in connection with repossession proceedings.

The legal advice and assistance services provided under Abhaile to distressed borrowers consist of three elements:

- A solicitor consultation service, which provides a single legal advice consultation to provide the borrower with independent legal advice on the borrower's best options for sustainable resolution of the mortgage arrears on their home;
- A duty solicitor service, which provides advice and assistance at county registrars' courts to unrepresented borrowers who are defendants in repossession proceedings against their homes;
- A legal aid service for personal insolvency court reviews, which provides legal aid in connection with proceedings under section 115A of the Personal Insolvency Acts (i.e, where a borrower wishes to seek a court review in circumstances where the creditors have rejected a proposal for a PIA).

It is understood that the Deputy's query relates to the consultation solicitor and duty solicitor services.

The solicitor consultation service

As at 19 January 2018, 2,177 borrowers had been issued legal advice vouchers under Abhaile. This voucher entitles the person to a free legal advice consultation with a solicitor. The service provided by the solicitor entails:

- arranging a consultation with the borrower and taking instructions;
- checking the borrower's legal position, explaining it clearly to the borrower and answering his or her questions;
- advising the borrower on any related legal complications (for example, where a co-borrower is not cooperating in efforts to resolve the mortgage arrears);
- advising the borrower on any legal aspects of possible solutions, including solutions arising from financial advice and assistance provided under Abhaile;
- if the borrower is facing repossession proceedings, assessing whether the borrower appears to have a valid legal defence to those proceedings;
- explaining how to apply for civil legal aid to defend the proceedings, if the borrower appears to have a defence to repossession satisfying the merits criteria under sections 24 and 28 of the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995;
- if the borrower does not have a legal defence, informing the borrower about the Duty Solicitor Service available under Abhaile,
- providing to the borrower, in writing, the legal advice given at the consultation(s), and

providing a copy of that written advice to the borrower's Abhaile financial adviser.

A fixed fee of €250 plus VAT is payable to the solicitor under Abhaile for providing the above service. There is no fee payable by the borrower.

In certain circumstances, the Legal Aid Board may, on application from the solicitor, grant the solicitor authority to continue to provide legal advice to the borrower, in the form of negotiating and concluding a solution with the mortgage lender. In that case the solicitor will also hold a final consultation with the borrower and again confirm that advice in writing. In such circumstances an additional fee of €200+VAT is payable to the solicitor and again there is no fee payable by the borrower.

It should be noted that the solicitor consultation service is an "advice only" service. It does not provide legal aid in connection with court proceedings, and it is not necessary that court proceedings have been issued before a person can avail of the service. For this reason, statistics on this service do not refer to court circuits.

The duty solicitor service

The duty solicitor service provides limited assistance in the County Registrars' courts to unrepresented defendants facing repossession proceedings against their homes. The service consists of providing advice and assistance to the borrower at the Courthouse, and includes:

- explaining clearly to the borrower their legal position regarding the repossession proceedings;
- answering his or her questions;
- speaking on the borrower's behalf in Court;
- seeking an adjournment and/or settlement of the proceedings in favour of the borrower.

The Duty Solicitor service does not require a voucher. The borrower does not have to have already seen an Abhaile adviser: it may assist if they have, as the duty solicitor can be provided in advance with a copy of the consultation solicitor's written legal advice. In practice, most borrowers helped by a Duty Solicitor have not previously sought legal advice - however, the Duty Solicitor or the MABS Court Mentor present at court can refer them for further help under Abhaile.

The figures that follow show the number of sittings in each Circuit Court circuit for which a duty solicitor has been, or is scheduled to be, provided, in the period between September 2016 and the end of March 2018 (end of the current Courts term).

| Circuit | No of court dates |
|---------------|-------------------|
| Dublin | 122 |
| Cork | 58 |
| Eastern | 113 |
| Midland | 156 |
| Northern | 84 |
| South Eastern | 185 |
| South Western | 80 |
| Western | 37 |
| Total | 835 |

Under Abhaile, a duty solicitor is rostered to attend court on a date when the County Registrar is scheduled to deal with repossession cases, and is then available to assist unrepresented borrowers attending that sitting. The duty solicitor is paid a fixed fee of €250+VAT for attending a half day sitting and €350+VAT for attending a full day sitting, irrespective of the number of borrowers assisted. (The overwhelming majority of duty solicitor services are paid at the half day rate). There is no fee payable by the borrower.

Comprehensive figures are not available for all borrowers helped by Duty Solicitors under Abhaile. However, at least 3,340 unrepresented borrowers have been assisted by duty solicitors at repossession court lists around the country to date.

EU Funding

150. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the contracts and projects awarded to companies since 2009 that have been supported or co-financed by the EU under the internal security fund; the names of the companies that have been awarded the contracts; and the costs associated with same, in tabular form. [7901/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The purpose of the Internal Security Fund (ISF) is to promote the implementation of the EU's Internal Security Strategy, law enforcement cooperation, and the management of the Union's external borders. The Finance Directorate of An Garda Síochána is the designated Responsible Authority of the ISF.

I am advised by the Garda authorities that as prescribed by EU Procurement Directives certain exemptions can be invoked, in particular, in the areas of Defence and Security contracts for goods and/or services. To provide details of these contracts would give rise to unnecessary risk to the essential security interests of the State.

However, I am informed by the Garda authorities that, since 2009 total expenditure for the ISF is €2,529,630.

Garda Vetting Applications

151. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason an application for Garda vetting has not been processed by Bus Éireann for a person (details supplied). [7906/18]

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

Liquor Licence Data

152. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of liquor licensing offences disclosed annually, by Garda district, in each of the years 2010 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form. [7907/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested a report

from the Garda authorities in relation to this matter and I will contact the Deputy directly when the report is to hand.

Road Traffic Accidents Data

153. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will report on the 89 road traffic fatalities which should have been classified as homicides between 2003 and 2017; the criteria used on the 89 fatal road traffic collisions, RTCs, leading them to be classified as less serious offences; the location where each of these fatal collisions occurred; the number of fatalities in each, by Garda district; the details of the less serious offence classification attributed to those 89 fatal RTCs; if the families have been identified and notified by An Garda Síochána; the number of persons who were seriously injured in these collisions and the classification for those; the criteria An Garda Síochána is using for the recording of serious and fatal RTCs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7916/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have requested a report from An Garda Síochána in relation to the information and statistics sought by the Deputy and I will be in contact with the Deputy directly on receipt of a Garda report.

Garda Youth Diversion Projects

154. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the tendering process for the forthcoming Kerry GYDP scheme; the process for selection; when the information will be available on all projects; if they will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7931/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I take it that the Deputy is referring primarily to the upcoming call for proposals process for the provision of Garda Youth Diversion Project (GYDP) services throughout the country.

I can inform the Deputy that my Department is obliged to carry out a call for proposals process in relation to GYDP services in 2018, to comply fully with requirements related with the co-funding of projects by the European Social Fund Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020.

GYDPs deliver a valuable service to young offenders and provide an effective and essential support to the operation of the statutory Garda Diversion Programme by An Garda Síochána. The call for proposals provides the opportunity to update and improve the operating model of a very valuable service. The new model will ensure access in all areas of the State to GYDP services for young people who have committed a crime or engaged in anti-social behaviour.

While certain aspects of the new service model have been determined, IYJS is currently undertaking an extensive consultation process with relevant stakeholders in relation to all aspects of the GYDP change programme with a view to informing further development of the model prior to the call for proposals being issued.

I am advised that, following the current consultations, the Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS) intend to publish full details of the call for proposals and the selection process. This is expected during Quarter 2 of this year.

As the Deputy may also be aware, an independent evaluation report is awaited on a pilot GYDP service delivery model that was introduced in County Kerry in 2015. The outcome of

this examination will assist IYJS in the development of GYDP services generally.

Garda Data

155. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in County Kildare by division, district and rank; the number of Garda vehicles based full-time in County Kildare, by vehicle type, division and-or district; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7943/18]

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

The Garda strength of the Kildare Division on 31 December 2017 was 360 with 20 Garda Reserves and 30 Garda civilian staff attached to the Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Armed Support Units, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

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

I am informed by the Commissioner that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, just under 1,600 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, of whom 80 have been assigned to the Kildare Division. I am pleased to say that Garda numbers, taking account of retirements, increased to 13,551 at the end of 2017 - a net 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 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College. Also 800 Garda 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.

In addition, a further 500 civilians will also be recruited to fill critical skills gaps across the organisation and to facilitate the redeployment of Gardaí from administrative and technical duties to front-line operational duties. There are plans to strengthen the Garda Reserve with new Reserves expected to commence training in 2018.

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

The investment in personnel I have outlined is complemented by substantial investment in resources across the board for An Garda Síochána. The Capital Plan 2016 – 2021 provides for

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an investment of €46 million the Garda fleet to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit for purpose fleet. This is in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the period 2013 to 2015.

In the period 2013 to end of 2017 almost €44 million will have been invested in the fleet with some 2,000 vehicles coming on stream in that period.

For the Deputy's information the following tables set out the number of Gardaí attached to the Kildare Division on 31 December 2017 and the number of Garda vehicles allocated to the Kildare Divisional fleet as of 14 February 2018.

Kildare Divisional Fleet as on 14 February 2018

| - | Cars | | Vans | | Motor-cycles | 4 x 4 | Others | Total |
|------------------|--------|----------|--------|----------|--------------|-------|--------|-------|
| | Marked | Unmarked | Marked | Unmarked | | | | |
| KILDARE DISTRICT | 11 | 9 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 26 |
| LEIXLIP DISTRICT | 4 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 11 |
| NAAS DISTRICT | 8 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 22 |
| DIVISIONAL TOTAL | 23 | 19 | 9 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 59 |

| STRENGTH OF THE KILDARE DIVISION 31 DECEMBER 2017 | | | | | | | |
|---|--------------|-----|----|----|----|----|-------|
| DISTRICT | STATION | GD | SG | IN | SU | CS | TOTAL |
| KILDARE | ATHY | 26 | 3 | 1 | | | 30 |
| | CASTLEDERMOT | 3 | 1 | | | | 4 |
| | KILDARE | 30 | 6 | 1 | 1 | | 38 |
| | MONASTEREVIN | 4 | 1 | | | | 5 |
| | NEWBRIDGE | 46 | 6 | | | | 52 |
| | RATHANGAN | 2 | 1 | | | | 3 |
| | TOTAL | 111 | 18 | 2 | 1 | | 132 |
| LEIXLIP | CARBURY | 6 | 1 | | | | 7 |
| | CELBRIDGE | 10 | 1 | | | | 11 |
| | KILCOCK | 9 | 1 | | | | 10 |
| | LEIXLIP | 48 | 8 | 2 | 1 | | 59 |
| | MAYNOOTH | 12 | 1 | | | | 13 |
| | TOTAL | 85 | 12 | 2 | 1 | | 100 |
| NAAS | CLANE | 6 | 1 | | | | 7 |
| | KILCULLEN | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| | NAAS | 100 | 14 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 118 |
| | ROBERTSTOWN | 2 | | | | | 2 |
| | TOTAL | 109 | 15 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 128 |
| KILDARE TOTAL | | 305 | 45 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 360 |

Residency Permits

156. Deputy **Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress

or eligibility for stamp four of an application for long-term residency for a person (details supplied) in view of the fact that the person has been here for 11 years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7945/18]

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

157. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed to regularise residency stamp 4 eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7946/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I have been informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned currently has an application pending for residency in the State arising from their marriage to an Irish national.

Applications of this type, in fairness to all other such applicants, are dealt with in chronological order and a decision will issue on their case in due course.

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

158. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the deportation order in the case of a person (details supplied) will be revoked; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7947/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Services (INIS) of my Department that the person concerned is the subject of a Deportation Order made on 8 April 2016 as she remained in the State without the permission of the Minister. That Order remains valid and in place.

Representations were received from the person concerned and her legal representative requesting that the Deportation Order be revoked, pursuant to the provisions of Section 3(11) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended). Following the consideration of that request, a decision was taken in September 2017 that the Deportation Order should be affirmed and this decision was communicated to the person concerned and her legal representative by registered post dated 20 September 2017.

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

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

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

Naturalisation Applications

159. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to set out the status of the determination of eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7948/18]

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 was granted residence permission and a right to work based on parentage of an Irish citizen child on 12 January 2016. The permission was subsequently renewed by INIS until 24 March 2018. The person concerned was informed in the decision letter that if they wished to apply for future renewals of permission to remain that they should apply in writing to INIS four weeks in advance of their permission expiring.

I am also advised by INIS that there is no record of an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application and supporting documentation is received.

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

Naturalisation Applications

160. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to set out the residency status and eligibility for naturalisation in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7949/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the persons concerned applied for residence permission and a right to work based on parentage of an Irish citizen child. Decision letters were issued to the persons concerned on 13 December 2017 granting them permission to remain in the State on stamp 4 conditions, until 13 December 2020.

I am also advised by INIS that there is no record of a current application for a certificate of naturalisation from the persons concerned. A determination on whether an applicant satisfies the statutory criteria attendant to naturalisation can only be made after an application and supporting documentation is received.

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

Citizenship Applications

161. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to set out the residency status and eligibility for citizenship in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7950/18]

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 an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy, who currently has permission to reside in the State until 6 August 2018, is under consideration and has not yet reached a conclusion but I understand however that the case is due to be submitted for decision very shortly.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

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

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

Residency Permits

162. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if all documentation has been furnished to facilitate update of stamp 4 and if arrangements will be made for the latter in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7951/18]

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 was granted permission to remain in the State, on a stamp 4 basis, as the parent of an Irish citizen child in 2000. The permission was subsequently renewed with the latest permission granted up to 15 July 2017 by the Garda National Immigration Bureau. An application for renewal of permission to remain in the State was received by INIS on 19 January 2018.

INIS was in contact with the person concerned on 21 January 2018 seeking supporting documentary evidence. No correspondence has been submitted to date in response to the request. The application will be considered further on receipt of all of the required documentation.

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

Residency Permits

163. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to set out the residency status and eligibility for long-term residency stamp 4 naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7952/18]

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 was granted permission to remain in the State, on a stamp 4 basis, as the parent of an Irish citizen child in 2000. The permission was subsequently renewed by the Garda National Immigration Bureau with the latest permission granted up to 23 May 2018.

In order to make an application for Long Term Residency in the State the person concerned must have been legally resident in the State for a minimum of 5 years (i.e. 60 months) on work permit/work authorisation/working visa conditions.

I am generally aware that foreign nationals living in the State can encounter difficulties in the area of obtaining or renewing passports particularly when there is no embassy or consulate here to assist. As you will appreciate, the conditions under which a national passport is issued or renewed is essentially a matter between the citizen and the national government.

As the current immigration of the person concerned is due to expire, they should apply for renewal of this permission with the Garda National Immigration Bureau and provide evidence that they have been in contact with their embassy for consular assistance.

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

164. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the application process for long-term residency stamp 4 in the case of a person (details supplied) will be facilitated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7953/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that no application for Long Term Residency was received from the person concerned.

In order to make an application for Long Term Residency in the State the person concerned must have been legally resident in the State for a minimum of 5 years (i.e. 60 months) on work permit/work authorisation/working visa conditions. Details of the application process are available on the INIS website at http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/Long_Term_Residency.

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.

Family Reunification Applications

165. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to outline the appropriate procedure to follow in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7954/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the person in question made an application for family reunification under the provisions of the Refugee Act 1996 in December 2016. The case has been finalised and a decision letter issued to the applicant on 30 November 2017.

It is open to Irish citizens and those outside the International Protection process to apply for family reunification under the Non-EEA Policy Document on Family Reunification, which is available on the INIS website, 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 established specifically 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.

Residency Permits

166. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to set out the residency status and eligibility for stamp 4 or long-term residency or eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7955/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I would refer the Deputy to my response to his Parliamentary Question No. 212 on 14 December 2017. I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the situation remains unchanged.

INIS has received requests for permission to remain in the State by the persons concerned. However, these cases are among a number of cases which are currently being held by my Department pending the outcome of the appeal to the Supreme Court of the Court of Appeal judgment in *Luximon v. Minister for Justice and Equality*, which was heard in the Supreme Court on 30 November 2017. A decision will issue in these cases when the matters before the Courts have been finalised.

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

167. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality to set out the residency status and-or eligibility for stamp 4 naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7956/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The position remains as outlined in response to the Deputy's Parliamentary Question No. 164 of 8 February 2018. I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that an application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy was refused for reasons provided to the person concerned in a letter issued on 5 February 2018 advising of the decision. The person concerned currently has permission to reside in the State until 20 September 2018.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for a certificate of naturalisation if and when they are in a position to meet the statutory requirements as prescribed in the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956, as amended. The fact that a person may have had an application refused does not preclude or disqualify them from submitting a fresh application in the future. Indeed, the letter advising an applicant of a negative decision also informs them that they may re-apply for the grant of a certificate of naturalisation at any time. The letter advises that, when considering making such a re-application, they should give due regard to the reasons for the refusal which were contained in the submission attached to the refusal letter and that any further application will be considered taking into account all statutory and administrative conditions applicable at the time of application.

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 I know the Deputy will appreciate that it is important that appropriate procedures are

in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

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

Immigration Status

168. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7957/18]

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

Regarding the persons concerned INIS advise that they might in the first instance consider consulting the INIS website www.inis.gov.ie as it contains information on all matters relating to immigration. The INIS Policy Document on Non-EEA Family Reunification is found at www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/immigration-policy-family-reunification and may be of relevance to the circumstances of the persons concerned.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been 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 Parliamentary Question 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.

Naturalisation Applications

169. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if all documentation has been supplied as requested to assist consideration of an application for naturalisation in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7958/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that processing of the applications for a certificate of naturalisation from the persons referred to by the Deputy are ongoing and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible. There is no further documentation requested at this time. Additional information may, if required, be requested from the applicants in due course.

As the Deputy will appreciate, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

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

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

Garda Deployment

170. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of juvenile liaison officers allocated to County Kildare by district and-or division; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7973/18]

171. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of junior liaison officers assigned by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8037/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 170 and 171 together.

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

I am advised by the Commissioner that Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers (JLOs) are specially trained to fulfil a key role in implementing the Garda Diversion Programme at local level. This role may include the administration of formal and informal cautions as well as appropriate supervision of children who have been admitted to the Diversion Programme, as provided in Part 4 of the Children Act 2001.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the information requested by the Deputy is not readily available in the format requested, as resources are assigned on a Garda Divisional basis which does not necessarily accord to County boundaries.

For the Deputy's information I have set out in the table the number of Gardaí who are assigned to JLO duties in each Garda Division as of 31 December 2017.

| Juvenile Liaison Officers 31 December 2017 | |
|--|----|
| CAVAN/MONAGHAN | 2 |
| CLARE | 2 |
| CORK CITY | 10 |
| CORK NORTH | 3 |
| CORK WEST | 2 |
| DMR EAST | 5 |

| Juvenile Liaison Officers 31 December 2017 | |
|--|-----|
| DMR NORTH | 12 |
| DMR NORTH CENTRAL | 4 |
| DMR SOUTH | 10 |
| DMR SOUTH CENTRAL | 5 |
| DMR WEST | 11 |
| DONEGAL | 3 |
| GALWAY | 3 |
| KERRY | 4 |
| KILDARE | 3 |
| KILKENNY/CARLOW | 2 |
| LAOIS/OFFALY | 2 |
| LIMERICK | 5 |
| LOUTH | 3 |
| MAYO | 2 |
| MEATH | 3 |
| ROSCOMMON/LONGFORD | 2 |
| SLIGO/LEITRIM | 1 |
| TIPPERARY | 3 |
| WATERFORD | 4 |
| WESTMEATH | 2 |
| WEXFORD | 2 |
| WICKLOW | 4 |
| TOTAL | 114 |

Garda Data

172. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of newly qualified trainee gardaí assigned by county in each of the years from 2010 to 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8038/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, the Garda Commissioner is responsible for the distribution of resources, and I as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. I am assured by the Commissioner that Garda personnel assigned throughout the country, together with the overall policing arrangements and operational strategies are continually monitored and reviewed. Such monitoring ensures that optimum use is made of resources and the best possible policing service is provided to the general public.

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

I am informed by the Commissioner that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, just under 1,600 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. I am pleased to say that Garda numbers, taking account of retirements, increased to 13,551 at the end of 2017 - a net 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 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College. Also 800 Garda 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.

In addition, a further 500 civilians will also be recruited to fill critical skills gaps across the organisation and to facilitate the redeployment of Gardaí from administrative and technical duties to front-line operational duties. There are plans to strengthen the Garda Reserve with new Reserves expected to commence training in 2018.

In so far as the allocation of newly attested Gardaí is concerned, this is a matter for the Commissioner. I am assured by the Commissioner that the needs of all Garda Divisions are fully considered when determining the allocation of resources. However, it is important to keep in mind that newly attested Gardaí have a further 16 months of practical and classroom based training to complete in order to receive their BA in Applied Policing. To ensure that they are properly supported and supervised and have opportunities to gain the breadth of policing experience required, the Commissioner's policy is to allocate them to specially designated training stations which have the required training and development structures and resources in place, including trained Garda tutors and access to a permanently appointed supervisory Sergeant who is thoroughly familiar with their responsibilities under the training programme.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána with no new recruits attesting from 2011 to 2014. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources needed to allow the deployment of increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division.

I am informed by the Commissioner that the information requested by the Deputy is not readily available in the format requested, as resources are assigned on a Divisional basis which does not necessarily accord to county boundaries. For the Deputy's information I have set out the number of new Garda recruits by Division in each of the years 2010, 2015, 2016 and 2017, in tabular form. There were no Garda trainees attested in 2011-2014.

Probationer Gardaí Allocations by Division 2010-2017

| DIVISION | 2010 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | Total |
|----------------------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| D.M.R. EAST | 10 | 9 | 19 | 37 | 75 |
| D.M.R. NORTH | 19 | 19 | 34 | 70 | 142 |
| D.M.R. NORTH CENTRAL | 25 | 22 | 44 | 69 | 160 |
| D.M.R. SOUTH | 14 | 19 | 33 | 66 | 132 |
| D.M.R. SOUTH CENTRAL | 26 | 21 | 42 | 78 | 167 |
| D.M.R. WEST | 13 | 29 | 35 | 73 | 150 |
| KILDARE | 4 | 14 | 19 | 47 | 84 |
| LAOIS / OFFALY | 5 | 9 | 20 | 42 | 76 |
| MEATH | 7 | 5 | 19 | 30 | 61 |
| WESTMEATH | 1 | 5 | 5 | 22 | 33 |
| WICKLOW | 6 | 7 | - | 19 | 32 |
| CAVAN / MONAGHAN | 5 | 10 | 8 | 22 | 45 |

| DIVISION | 2010 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | Total |
|----------------------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| DONEGAL | 13 | 10 | 5 | 13 | 41 |
| LOUTH | 13 | 10 | 17 | 34 | 74 |
| SLIGO / LEITRIM | 5 | 5 | 5 | 8 | 23 |
| KILKENNY/CARLOW | 4 | 9 | 10 | 30 | 53 |
| TIPPERARY | 5 | 5 | 14 | 21 | 45 |
| WATERFORD | 6 | 14 | 10 | 30 | 60 |
| WEXFORD | 1 | 14 | 10 | 34 | 59 |
| CORK CITY | 6 | 7 | 5 | 26 | 44 |
| CORK NORTH | - | - | 5 | 15 | 20 |
| CORK WEST | 2 | 5 | - | 15 | 22 |
| KERRY | 3 | 9 | - | 17 | 29 |
| LIMERICK | 13 | 9 | 17 | 18 | 57 |
| CLARE | 9 | 10 | 5 | 10 | 34 |
| GALWAY | 3 | 5 | 5 | 10 | 23 |
| MAYO | 3 | 5 | - | 14 | 22 |
| ROSCOMMON / LONGFORD | 3 | - | 5 | 10 | 18 |
| TOTAL | 224 | 286 | 391 | 880 | 1781 |

Garda Retirements

173. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of retired gardaí and the rank of each who retired in each of the years 2010 to 2017, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8039/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Members of An Garda Síochána who joined the organisation prior to 1 April 2004 may retire on full pension once they have served for at least 30 years and they have reached 50 years of age. Members of An Garda Síochána who joined the organisation on or after 1 April 2004 may retire on full pension once they have served at least 30 years and have reached 55 years of age. A member has the option of continuing to serve until they reach 60 years of age subject to the Garda Commissioner being satisfied that the member is fully competent and available to undertake, and fully capable of undertaking, the duties of his or her position as a member of the Garda Síochána.

I have set out for the Deputy's information the number of departures from An Garda Síochána in the years 2010 to 2017 in tabular form as supplied by the Commissioner. These figures include those who departed due to voluntary, compulsory, or cost neutral early retirement, resignation, death, dismissal and medical discharge.

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

I am informed by the Commissioner that since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, just under 1,600 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. I am pleased to say that Garda numbers, taking account of retirements, increased to 13,551 at the end of 2017 - a net 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 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College. Also 800 Garda 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.

In addition, a further 500 civilians will also be recruited to fill critical skills gaps across the organisation and to facilitate the redeployment of Gardaí from administrative and technical duties to front-line operational duties. There are plans to strengthen the Garda Reserve with new Reserves expected to commence training in 2018.

I can assure the Deputy that projected departures from An Garda Síochána are kept under continuing review and the level of recruitment adjusted as necessary in order to achieve the desired strength.

| DEPARTURES from An Garda Síochána 2010-2017 | | | | | | | | | |
|---|-----|-------|----|--------|------|------|-----|-------|-------|
| | Com | D/Com | AC | C/Supt | Supt | Insp | Sgt | Garda | Total |
| 2017 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 6 | 11 | 20 | 72 | 169 | 282 |
| 2016 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 5 | 6 | 16 | 64 | 170 | 263 |
| 2015 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 11 | 14 | 83 | 169 | 282 |
| 2014 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 8 | 15 | 83 | 180 | 291 |
| 2013 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 16 | 13 | 91 | 211 | 335 |
| 2012 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 19 | 24 | 119 | 294 | 462 |
| 2011 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 8 | 23 | 19 | 109 | 318 | 480 |
| 2010 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 14 | 8 | 100 | 279 | 407 |

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Staff

174. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the rank of each member of An Garda Síochána assigned to the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement; the number and rank of vacant Garda positions at the ODCE; and the date at which the vacancy arose. [7933/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement has an approved complement of 7 members of An Garda Síochána. This is comprised of one Detective Inspector, two Detective Sergeants and four Detective Gardaí. There are no vacancies at present.

Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement Staff

175. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of months in each of the years 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018 the position of detective inspector assigned to the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement was vacant. [7934/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Director of Corporate Enforcement engages directly with An Garda Síochána regarding Garda resourcing of the ODCE.

A vacancy arose in respect of a Detective Inspector post on 30 September 2016. It was filled on 27 November 2017. The role has been filled on an interim full-time basis since then. I understand that this post is among a number of Detective Inspector posts which are the subject of an internal Garda Síochána promotions competition, which is expected to conclude in the coming months. Following this, a full-time Detective Inspector will be assigned to the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement, ODCE, on a permanent basis.

In terms of the number of months in each of the years in question that the position was vacant, these are as follows:

2016 - 3 months

2017 - 11 months

2018 - Nil.

Gambling Legislation

176. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the way in which video games and gaming are regulated here in terms of content, age rating, sale to minors, purchase of online upgrades, the prevalence of gambling and so on; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7966/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As the Minister for Justice and Equality has policy responsibility for gambling legislation, I am not in a position to say what measures, if any, are being taken under such legislation to monitor in-game purchases by minors or the prevalence of gambling in such games. As the Deputy may be aware, the Minister for Justice and Equality is currently working on updating the General Scheme of the Gambling Control Bill.

Video and computer games, whether in online or other form, are subject to the provisions of general consumer protection legislation. The Consumer Protection Act 2007 (which gives effect to Directive 2005/29/EC on Unfair Commercial Practices) contains provisions of general application on unfair, misleading and aggressive commercial practices that may be relevant in some cases to video and computer games. The European Communities (Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts) Regulations 1995 (which give effect to Directive 93/13/EEC on unfair terms in contracts) apply similarly to consumer contracts for video and computer games. The information requirements of the European Union (Consumer Information, Cancellation and Other Rights) Regulations 2013 (which give effect to Directive 2011/83/EU on Consumer Rights) apply to consumer contracts for video and computer games as, subject to certain specified exceptions, does the right of consumers under the Regulations to cancel an online contract for video or computer games within 14 days of delivery of the goods in the case of games supplied in tangible form or of the conclusion of the contract in the case of games supplied in digital form. The Regulations do not apply however to contracts for gambling, defined as “wagering a stake with pecuniary value in games of chance, including lotteries, casino games and betting transactions.” If the Deputy has reason to believe that video and computer games are in breach of any of the above-mentioned legislation, I suggest that she provide details to the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission which has responsibility for their enforcement.

In June 2016, the Justice and Home Affairs Council agreed a General Approach on a proposed Directive on contracts for the supply of digital content, including digital games. The proposed Directive is currently the subject of trilogue discussions involving the European Council, Commission and Parliament. It deals with matters such as the supply of digital content, its

conformity with the contract in respect of a wide range of requirements including quality, functionality, compatibility, interoperability, fitness for normal purposes, fitness for any particular purpose made known by the consumer, and updates. The General Approach also sets out the remedies available to consumers where digital content does not comply with these requirements. It excludes from the scope of the Directive gambling services, defined as “services which involve wagering a skill with pecuniary value in games of chance, including those with an element of skill, such as lotteries, casino games, poker games and betting transactions, by electronic means or any other technology for facilitating communication and the individual request of a recipient of a service.”

In general, these consumer protection measures aim to protect the economic interests of consumers and do not deal with matters such as age rating and the protection of minors.

Brexit Documents

177. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the name, costs, date of commission and date of publication of all external reports commissioned by her Department since June 2016 regarding Brexit, in tabular form; the date or expected date of the publication; the name of the external consultant for each such report; and if all such reports have been published. [7980/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As the Deputy will be aware, my department is conducting a number of research projects to build an understanding of the possible implications of Brexit on Ireland for enterprise and our trading relations.

These studies 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 inform our domestic policy response to Brexit.

The details of the Brexit related research undertaken by my department are outlined in the following table.

| Title | Cost | Research by | Date of Commission | Publication |
|--|--------------------|--|--------------------|--------------------|
| Strategic Implications for Ireland arising from changing EU-UK Trading patterns. | €174,000 (Ex. VAT) | Copenhagen Economics | 26th June 2017 | 13th February 2018 |
| Sectoral implications arising from Brexit: Most exposed sectors | €69,950 (Ex. VAT) | DBEI research and Deloitte | 26th June 2017 | Due Q2 2018 |
| Import Content of Irish Exports and Implications of Brexit | €40,000 (Ex. VAT) | Economic and Social Research Institute | September 2017 | Due Q2 2018 |

| Title | Cost | Research by | Date of Commission | Publication |
|---|--------------------|--|--------------------|--|
| The Potential Impact of WTO Tariffs and other key relevant issues on Cross-Border Trade | €90,000*(Inc. VAT) | Economic and Social Research Institute | December 2016 | Phase 1 published June 2017;Phase 2 due Q1 2018;Phase 3 due Q 3 2018 |
| Brexit - the View of Irish SMEs (Survey) | €25,000 (Ex. VAT) | Behaviours and Attitudes | July 2017 | Published 22 January 2018 |
| Brexit - the View of Irish SMEs (Survey) | €52,250(Ex. VAT) | Behaviours and Attitudes | December 2017 | Published 8 May 2017 |

*The project is managed by InterTrade Ireland and co-funded by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Northern Ireland Department for the Economy. Figure shown represents the full amount.

Workplace Relations Commission

178. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of inspections carried out by the workplace relations bodies in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to date in 2018 and county, in tabular form; the number of prosecutions undertaken in each county during that period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7981/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): Inspectors of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) carry out inspections of employer records with a view to determining compliance with employment rights legislation. These inspections arise:

- in response to complaints received of alleged non-compliance with relevant employment rights legislation;
- as part of compliance campaigns which focus on compliance in specific sectors or specific pieces of legislation, or
- as routine inspections, which act as a control measure.

The aim is to achieve voluntary compliance with employment law through the provision of education and awareness, inspection of employers' employment records, and enforcement where necessary. While every effort is made to secure compliance, some employers either refuse or fail to rectify the breaches identified and/or pay money due to their employees. These cases are referred for prosecution.

Details in relation to the number of inspections and prosecutions undertaken by county in each of the years 2014 to 2017 and to end January 2018 are provided in the following tables.

Inspections

| | 2018 to 31 Jan | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 |
|--------|----------------|------|------|------|------|
| CARLOW | 2 | 75 | 36 | 71 | 53 |

Questions - Written Answers

| | 2018 to 31 Jan | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 |
|-----------|----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| CAVAN | 5 | 88 | 117 | 134 | 137 |
| CLARE | 0 | 142 | 129 | 242 | 217 |
| CORK | 14 | 203 | 332 | 287 | 304 |
| DONEGAL | 3 | 153 | 128 | 184 | 153 |
| DUBLIN | 77 | 1,297 | 1,067 | 977 | 1,021 |
| GALWAY | 2 | 291 | 408 | 410 | 420 |
| KERRY | 2 | 61 | 96 | 51 | 59 |
| KILDARE | 13 | 168 | 186 | 246 | 316 |
| KILKENNY | 17 | 85 | 92 | 91 | 158 |
| LAOIS | 11 | 41 | 63 | 85 | 124 |
| LEITRIM | 2 | 52 | 36 | 24 | 23 |
| LIMERICK | 29 | 312 | 426 | 347 | 546 |
| LONGFORD | 2 | 97 | 79 | 76 | 73 |
| LOUTH | 4 | 259 | 177 | 182 | 121 |
| MAYO | 16 | 131 | 147 | 154 | 146 |
| MEATH | 8 | 124 | 121 | 143 | 120 |
| MONAGHAN | 9 | 112 | 69 | 77 | 82 |
| OFFALY | 17 | 155 | 76 | 91 | 57 |
| ROSCOMMON | 5 | 48 | 61 | 72 | 85 |
| SLIGO | 6 | 50 | 47 | 58 | 57 |
| TIPPERARY | 5 | 196 | 177 | 241 | 224 |
| WATERFORD | 11 | 129 | 207 | 166 | 115 |
| WESTMEATH | 7 | 160 | 117 | 133 | 153 |
| WEXFORD | 23 | 119 | 181 | 299 | 337 |
| WICKLOW | 11 | 199 | 255 | 344 | 490 |
| TOTAL | 301 | 4,747 | 4,830 | 5,185 | 5,591 |

Prosecutions

| | 2018 to 31 Jan | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 |
|----------|----------------|------|------|------|------|
| CARLOW | | 2 | 5 | 1 | 3 |
| CAVAN | | 1 | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| CLARE | | 3 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| CORK | | 5 | 2 | 7 | 1 |
| DONEGAL | | 4 | 2 | 6 | 1 |
| DUBLIN | | 9 | 7 | 13 | 24 |
| GALWAY | | 3 | 2 | 5 | 3 |
| KERRY | | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| KILDARE | | 6 | 11 | 9 | 5 |
| KILKENNY | 1 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 6 |
| LAOIS | | 8 | 6 | 2 | 1 |
| LEITRIM | | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| LIMERICK | | 5 | 2 | 4 | 3 |
| LONGFORD | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

| | 2018 to 31 Jan | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 |
|-----------|----------------|------|------|------|------|
| LOUTH | | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| MAYO | | 5 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| MEATH | | 2 | 9 | 1 | 1 |
| MONAGHAN | | 6 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| OFFALY | | 1 | 8 | 15 | 4 |
| ROSCOMMON | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| SLIGO | | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| TIPPERARY | | 8 | 6 | 5 | 6 |
| WATERFORD | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| WESTMEATH | | 7 | 1 | 6 | 3 |
| WEXFORD | | 7 | 5 | 6 | 6 |
| WICKLOW | | 4 | 7 | 7 | 8 |
| TOTAL | 4 | 95 | 85 | 106 | 84 |

Small and Medium Enterprises Supports

179. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the grant funding supports available for a person (details supplied). [7982/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): From the information provided by the Deputy, I am not aware of any grant that is available in the circumstances outlined.

In this regard, it is important to note that the banks are, and will continue to be, the first port of call for finance for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). However some Government initiatives have been introduced in order to ensure that SMEs obtain appropriate finance in order to sustain and grow their business.

In the event that this business has made a formal application to one of the main banks and has been refused, the first possibility is to appeal that decision to the Credit Review Office. This Office was established to provide a simple and effective review process for SMEs refused credit from the main banks, or where the SME considers that the terms or conditions attached to a credit facility or its price are so onerous as to amount to a constructive refusal.

While the Office has no statutory or regulatory powers to overturn bank lending decisions, it has been the experience to date that if the lending could have been made within acceptable risk boundaries, the bank will be required to comply with this recommendation, or to explain why it will not do so. To date, all banks have respected and complied with the Credit Review Office recommendations. It is important to note that you must make a formal loan application and have been refused before you can refer the matter to the Credit Review Office, which can be contacted at Tel: 1850 211 789 or online at www.creditreview.ie.

Again, in the event that a loan has or is likely to be refused, a second possibility is the Credit Guarantee Scheme under Minister Humphrey's remit. These are cases where the Minister shares with the bank a large part of the risk involved in the loan to an SME. This is exclusively targeted at SMEs that are unable to access credit because of these two particular market failures in operation, (i) the inadequacy of SME collateral and, (ii) the inadequacy of understanding of the novelty of a business model, market, sector or technology that the SME is involved in.

The first step towards availing of a credit guarantee would be for you to ask the bank that

has refused you lending (the 3 main banks AIB, Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank all participate in the Schemes), to request this avenue of funding, a process that would continue with the bank in question assessing the company's viability under alternative arrangements before making a decision. Further information on the Credit Guarantee Scheme is available at: <https://www.djei.ie/en/Publications/SME-Credit-Guarantee-Scheme-Information-Booklet.html>

Furthermore a wide list of over 100 possible Government supports is available online from the online tool available at

<https://www.supportingsmes.ie/BusinessDetails.aspx> and I would encourage the business to review this portal to establish the various potential supports available in the circumstances.

Brexit Issues

180. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if her Department has commissioned a report on potential growth and jobs opportunities that may arise from the UK's decision to leave the European Union. [7984/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): As part of the Government's response to Brexit, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation commissioned Copenhagen Economics to undertake a major study into the implications of Brexit for the Irish economy and trade. I have just published the output from this independent research in a report entitled "Ireland and the Impact of Brexit: Strategic Implications for Ireland Arising from Changing EU-UK Trading Relations". This research project adds to an already extensive evidence base that underpins the ongoing development of our response to Brexit.

Using a computable general equilibrium (CGE) model, this study quantifies the impact on the economy of possible new barriers to trade in goods and services which might emerge as a result of Brexit. This provides 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 help to inform domestic policy responses and measures necessary to mitigate risks and maximise opportunities arising as a result of Brexit.

The study models for a range of short and long term impacts of Brexit on key economic metrics, including GDP, exports, imports and wage rates. The main focus of the study is on the long term to show the possible impact of four Brexit scenarios in a putative "year 2030". All results are compared against a 2030 baseline which would have pertained had Brexit not occurred. These scenarios are:

- An EEA-type scenario
- A Customs Union scenario
- A Free Trade Agreement
- A (worst-case) WTO scenario

All of the scenarios examined produce a result that is less favourable than a non-Brexit scenario. Nevertheless, regardless of the scenario, the Irish economy is still expected to record strong, positive growth out to 2030 – Brexit has a dampening impact, however, resulting in a lower growth rate than would otherwise have occurred.

The study points to the fact that negotiating the best possible outcome will be the most ef-

fective mitigation measure in terms of limiting the damage of Brexit to Ireland. It also identifies the importance of progressing EU FTAs with other key trading partners.

Copenhagen Economics find that while the overall impact of Brexit will be negative for Ireland, there are certain opportunities arising from these changes. Copenhagen Economic grouped these opportunities into three categories: Trade, talent and investment.

As a result of Brexit, UK exporters will face new barriers in the EU market. This implies that UK products or services will be more expensive in the EU market, meaning that customers in other EU countries currently served by UK firms will be looking for alternative suppliers. This can present opportunities for Irish exporters, especially since there are many overlaps in the products export from the UK and from Ireland.

In terms of talent, the expected decline in economic activity in the UK following Brexit and in particular the uncertainty and sentiment of EU citizens in the UK presents another opportunity for Ireland. As the only English speaking country in the EU, aside from Malta, and with diverse job opportunities, Ireland can become a new home for talents deciding to leave the UK post-Brexit. This would particularly relevant in sectors and positions where there are already shortages in Ireland. This could include IT-specialists, researchers, financial service expert for example.

Copenhagen Economics find that the biggest opportunities in relation to Brexit arise from increased foreign direct investment (FDI). Our country's attractiveness to overseas companies is well-documented and will likely increase on account of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union, as some firms consider alternative locations for future investment. Ireland has, in fact, already seen both increased investment and interest from multinational businesses – particularly in the financial services sector – in the wake of the EU-UK referendum result and further Brexit-related FDI is expected in the time ahead.

IDA Ireland continues to identify potential for mobile FDI in key sectors and actively pursue these opportunities including through targeted trade missions and rollout of advertising campaigns to promote Ireland's offering particularly in talent and tax.

Overall, this independent research complements the Department's recently published "Building Stronger Business" report which summarises the policy measures that DBEI has already taken, those that are planned and the Departmental structural reforms put in place to ensure that we can work as efficiently and effectively as possible to support our companies.

Credit Guarantee Scheme Data

181. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the drawdown levels issued under the credit guarantee scheme; the value of approvals; the drawdown and approval, by county in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7987/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Credit Guarantee Scheme (CGS) has been in operation since 2012, and as of 31 December 2017, 530 loans to the value of €84,396,594 have been sanctioned by participating lenders under the scheme. The CGS is currently operated on behalf of the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI).

While the benefit of a guarantee is offered to a borrower under the scheme, some borrowers do not proceed with the guarantee. A significant number of cases are listed as 'Pending' by the

participating lenders, and the operator only holds partial information on such cases. As a result, it is not possible to quantify the drawdowns of loans considered under the scheme. A breakdown of sanctioned loans where county information is known is provided in the table.

In addition, Quarterly Reports providing full details of the latest Credit Guarantee Scheme performance are published on my Department's website.

Modification to the Credit Guarantee Scheme legislation was provided for in Statutory Instruments in late 2017 to give effect to necessary changes in the operation of the Scheme. I would expect that these changes will see enhanced use of the scheme in future years

The CGS is a central element of those supports which when combined with other Government initiatives such as Microfinance Ireland, the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland, the Credit Review Office and the Prompt Payment Code should enable companies to expand, service new markets and grow employment.

2017

| Year | No. Of Facilities Sanctioned | Amount of CGS Facilities Sanctioned |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 2012 | 6 | €582,000 |
| 2013 | 88 | €12,107,500 |
| 2014 | 68 | €9,283,344 |
| 2015 | 108 | €20,385,050 |
| 2016 | 131 | €22,312,000 |
| 2017 | 129 | €19,726,700 |
| Total as at 31st December 2017 | 530 | €84,396,594 |

| Status | No. of CGS Facilities | Amount of Lending |
|--|-----------------------|-------------------|
| CGS loans sanctioned by Lenders since launch | 530 | €84,396,594 |
| Declined or Cancelled by the customer | 67 | €11,171,250 |
| Declined by the lender | 3 | €180,000 |
| Ineligible | 3 | €467,000 |
| CGS Facilities at 31st December 2017 | 457 | €72,578,344 |

| County | Amount of Lending |
|----------|-------------------|
| Carlow | €1,770,000 |
| Cavan | €0 |
| Clare | €927,000 |
| Cork | €5,076,000 |
| Donegal | €197,000 |
| Dublin | €31,981,200 |
| Galway | €3,780,500 |
| Kerry | €2,610,000 |
| Kildare | €4,512,000 |
| Kilkenny | €0 |
| Laois | €1,606,950 |
| Leitrim | €1,000,000 |

| County | Amount of Lending |
|-----------|-------------------|
| Limerick | €7,445,594 |
| Longford | €0 |
| Louth | €1,637,000 |
| Mayo | €953,100 |
| Meath | €1,535,000 |
| Monaghan | €250,000 |
| Offaly | €790,000 |
| Roscommon | €80,000 |
| Sligo | €57,000 |
| Tipperary | €1,121,000 |
| Waterford | €1,000,000 |
| Westmeath | €1,522,000 |
| Wexford | €1,266,000 |
| Wicklow | €1,461,000 |

2016

| Year | No. Of Facilities Sanctioned | Amount of CGS Facilities Sanctioned |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 2012 | 6 | €582,000 |
| 2013 | 88 | €12,107,500 |
| 2014 | 68 | €9,283,344 |
| 2015 | 108 | €20,385,050 |
| 2016 | 131 | €22,772,000 |
| Total as at 31st December 2016 | 401 | €64,669,894 |

| Status | No. of CGS Facilities | Amount of Lending |
|--|-----------------------|-------------------|
| CGS loans sanctioned by Lenders since launch | 401 | €64,669,894 |
| Declined or Cancelled by the customer | 62 | €10,615,000 |
| Declined by the lender | 3 | €180,000 |
| Ineligible | 3 | €467,000 |
| CGS Facilities at 31st December 2016 | 333 | €53,407,894 |

| County | Amount of Lending |
|----------|-------------------|
| Carlow | €1,770,000 |
| Cavan | €0 |
| Clare | €667,000 |
| Cork | €3,348,000 |
| Donegal | €197,000 |
| Dublin | €24,182,000 |
| Galway | €2,241,500 |
| Kerry | €1,210,000 |
| Kildare | €3,285,000 |
| Kilkenny | €295,000 |

| County | Amount of Lending |
|-----------|-------------------|
| Laois | €1,916,950 |
| Leitrim | €1,000,000 |
| Limerick | €4,375,344 |
| Longford | €0 |
| Louth | €1,160,000 |
| Mayo | €733,100 |
| Meath | €795,000 |
| Monaghan | €250,000 |
| Offaly | €540,000 |
| Roscommon | €80,000 |
| Sligo | €57,000 |
| Tipperary | €1,071,000 |
| Waterford | €750,000 |
| Westmeath | €1,057,000 |
| Wexford | €1,266,000 |
| Wicklow | €1,161,000 |

Microfinance Loan Fund Scheme Data

182. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the value of drawdowns issued under the microfinance scheme on 31 December 2016 and 31 December 2017 respectively; the value of approvals on the same dates; the breakdown of each drawdown and approval, by county, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7988/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Board of Microfinance Ireland (MFI) provides me with Quarterly Reports of progress, and these are published on the websites of both MFI and my Department.

The county spread of approvals is contained in each Quarterly Report provided by Microfinance Ireland to my Department.

In relation to the drawdown figures requested by the Deputy, I have attached the available information relating to the figures as at 31 December 2016 and 31 December 2017 and an analysis of loan approvals for each county.

| | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------|
| Microfinance Ireland | | |
| Fund to date | | |
| | End 2016 | End 2017 |
| Loan Approvals | | |
| - Number | 1,167 | 1,567 |
| -Value €000 | 17,088 | 22,591 |
| | | |
| Loan Drawdowns | | |
| - Number | 995 | 1,353 |
| -Value €000 | 14,204 | 19,068 |
| Analysis by County | Loan Approvals (Nos) | |

| | | |
|----------------------|-------|-------|
| Microfinance Ireland | | |
| Carlow | 23 | 27 |
| Cavan | 38 | 46 |
| Clare | 39 | 51 |
| Cork | 89 | 116 |
| Donegal | 21 | 40 |
| Dublin | 247 | 333 |
| Galway | 55 | 76 |
| Kerry | 30 | 40 |
| Kildare | 43 | 58 |
| Kilkenny | 19 | 28 |
| Laois | 26 | 33 |
| Leitrim | 19 | 29 |
| Limerick | 59 | 71 |
| Longford | 28 | 35 |
| Louth | 22 | 35 |
| Mayo | 44 | 53 |
| Meath | 51 | 69 |
| Monaghan | 15 | 21 |
| Offaly | 20 | 32 |
| Roscommon | 28 | 32 |
| Sligo | 36 | 43 |
| Tipperary | 55 | 71 |
| Waterford | 40 | 60 |
| Westmeath | 32 | 45 |
| Wexford | 50 | 75 |
| Wicklow | 38 | 48 |
| Total | 1,167 | 1,567 |

| County | Approved |
|----------|----------|
| Carlow | 27 |
| Cavan | 46 |
| Clare | 51 |
| Cork | 116 |
| Donegal | 40 |
| Dublin | 333 |
| Galway | 76 |
| Kerry | 40 |
| Kildare | 58 |
| Kilkenny | 28 |
| Laois | 33 |
| Leitrim | 29 |
| Limerick | 71 |
| Longford | 35 |
| Louth | 35 |
| Mayo | 53 |

| County | Approved |
|-----------|----------|
| Meath | 69 |
| Monaghan | 21 |
| Offaly | 32 |
| Roscommon | 32 |
| Sligo | 43 |
| Tipperary | 71 |
| Waterford | 60 |
| Westmeath | 45 |
| Wexford | 75 |
| Wicklow | 48 |

Credit Guarantee Scheme Data

183. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the value of drawdowns issued under the credit guarantee scheme on 31 December 2016 and 31 December 2017, respectively; the value of approvals on the same dates; and the breakdown of each drawdown and approval, by county, in tabular form. [7989/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Credit Guarantee Scheme (CGS) has been in operation since 2012, and as of 31 December 2017, 530 loans to the value of €84,396,594 have been sanctioned by participating lenders under the scheme. The CGS is currently operated on behalf of the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI).

While the benefit of a guarantee is offered to a borrower under the scheme, some borrowers do not proceed with the guarantee. A significant number of cases are listed as 'Pending' by the participating lenders, and the operator only holds partial information on such cases. As a result, it is not possible to quantify the drawdowns of loans considered under the scheme. A breakdown of sanctioned loans where county information is known is provided in the tables.

In addition, Quarterly Reports providing full details of the latest Credit Guarantee Scheme performance are published on my Department's website.

Modification to the Credit Guarantee Scheme legislation was provided for in Statutory Instruments in late 2017 to give effect to necessary changes in the operation of the Scheme. I would expect that these changes will see enhanced use of the scheme in future years.

The CGS is a central element of those supports which when combined with other Government initiatives such as Microfinance Ireland, the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland, the Credit Review Office and the Prompt Payment Code should enable companies to expand, service new markets and grow employment.

I note that the amount of lending under this scheme was €19,170,450 for the 12 months to 31 December 2017.

2017

| Year | No. Of Facilities Sanctioned | Amount of CGS Facilities Sanctioned |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 2012 | 6 | €582,000 |
| 2013 | 88 | €12,107,500 |
| 2014 | 68 | €9,283,344 |
| 2015 | 108 | €20,385,050 |
| 2016 | 131 | €22,312,000 |
| 2017 | 129 | €19,726,700 |
| Total as at 31st December 2017 | 530 | €84,396,594 |

| Status | No. of CGS Facilities | Amount of Lending |
|--|-----------------------|-------------------|
| CGS loans sanctioned by Lenders since launch | 530 | €84,396,594 |
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| County | Amount of Lending |
|-----------|-------------------|
| Carlow | €1,770,000 |
| Cavan | €0 |
| Clare | €927,000 |
| Cork | €5,076,000 |
| Donegal | €197,000 |
| Dublin | €31,981,200 |
| Galway | €3,780,500 |
| Kerry | €2,610,000 |
| Kildare | €4,512,000 |
| Kilkenny | €0 |
| Laois | €1,606,950 |
| Leitrim | €1,000,000 |
| Limerick | €7,445,594 |
| Longford | €0 |
| Louth | €1,637,000 |
| Mayo | €953,100 |
| Meath | €1,535,000 |
| Monaghan | €250,000 |
| Offaly | €790,000 |
| Roscommon | €80,000 |
| Sligo | €57,000 |
| Tipperary | €1,121,000 |
| Waterford | €1,000,000 |
| Westmeath | €1,522,000 |
| Wexford | €1,266,000 |

Questions - Written Answers

| | |
|---------|-------------------|
| County | Amount of Lending |
| Wicklow | €1,461,000 |

2016

| Year | No. Of Facilities Sanctioned | Amount of CGS Facilities Sanctioned |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 2012 | 6 | €582,000 |
| 2013 | 88 | €12,107,500 |
| 2014 | 68 | €9,283,344 |
| 2015 | 108 | €20,385,050 |
| 2016 | 131 | €22,772,000 |
| Total as at 31st December 2016 | 401 | €64,669,894 |

| Status | No. of CGS Facilities | Amount of Lending |
|--|-----------------------|-------------------|
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| Declined by the lender | 3 | €180,000 |
| Ineligible | 3 | €467,000 |
| CGS Facilities at 31st December 2016 | 333 | €53,407,894 |

| County | Amount of Lending |
|-----------|-------------------|
| Carlow | €1,770,000 |
| Cavan | €0 |
| Clare | €667,000 |
| Cork | €3,348,000 |
| Donegal | €197,000 |
| Dublin | €24,182,000 |
| Galway | €2,241,500 |
| Kerry | €1,210,000 |
| Kildare | €3,285,000 |
| Kilkenny | €295,000 |
| Laois | €1,916,950 |
| Leitrim | €1,000,000 |
| Limerick | €4,375,344 |
| Longford | €0 |
| Louth | €1,160,000 |
| Mayo | €733,100 |
| Meath | €795,000 |
| Monaghan | €250,000 |
| Offaly | €540,000 |
| Roscommon | €80,000 |
| Sligo | €57,000 |
| Tipperary | €1,071,000 |
| Waterford | €750,000 |

| County | Amount of Lending |
|-----------|-------------------|
| Westmeath | €1,057,000 |
| Wexford | €1,266,000 |
| Wicklow | €1,161,000 |

Workplace Relations Commission

184. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the research presented at a WRC seminar, *The World of Work: A Shifting Landscape* (details supplied); and when all research data will be published and accessible [7992/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen): The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) commissioned the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) to undertake research into the development of new working trends and patterns, including the phenomenon of what is referred to as “gig” work, and into contingent work more generally in the Irish economy.

I understand that the objective of the research was to ascertain the extra of this phenomenon in Ireland and its prevalence across the different sectors of the economy. Over the past number of years, more sophisticated ICT platforms have facilitated the development of new categories of flexible work relationships and this has been the source of significant commentary. I anticipate that the data from this research will be of significant value to policy makers in terms of informing any future policy initiatives around newer working methods.

I am advised that the ESRI research paper has not yet been made publicly available but understand that it will be published shortly. As this research was commissioned independently by the WRC, I have not yet seen the paper and so am not in a position to comment further at this stage.

As regards the other presentations presented at the WRC seminar entitled, “*The World of Work: A Shifting Landscape*” on 6th of February 2018, these will be posted on the WRC website at www.workplacerelations.ie this week.

Trade Relations

185. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of trade discussions between the European Union and Mexico and potential growth and jobs opportunities for Ireland; and if she will report on the likely inclusion of a multilateral investment court system as part of the final agreement. [7993/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): In 1997, Mexico was the first Latin American country to conclude an Economic Partnership, Political Coordination and Cooperation Agreement with the EU. Mexico has been a strategic partner of the EU since 2008.

The EU and Mexico met in Brussels on the 13th and 14th June 2016 to start the negotiation process for the modernisation of the EU-Mexico Global Agreement. The negotiations aim to broaden the scope of the Global Agreement and adjust it to the new political and economic global challenges. Modernisation includes regulatory cooperation, more trade in agriculture and food, common sanitary and phytosanitary standards (protection of human, animal or plant life or health from certain risks), sustainable development and rules of origin.

Ireland supports the modernisation of the EU-Mexico Global Agreement. The main benefits for Ireland in a modernised agreement with Mexico would include the opening up of public procurement markets to Irish businesses and the removal of technical barriers to trade to reduce the costs of entry to the Mexican market. It will further remove industrial tariffs and important agricultural tariffs. This will be important for Ireland's important Agri-food sector especially for dairy products where Ireland is a significant exporter to Mexico of powdered milk and milk derivatives but there are currently significant barriers both to increasing powdered milk exports and to commencing exports of fresh dairy produce.

The current round of negotiations between the EU and Mexico to modernize the trade pillar of the Global Agreement is taking place this week in Mexico City. Both parties are committed to reaching a political agreement on the deal as soon as possible. The parties have made important progress to this end but there is still further work on a number of issues related to market access and rules including opening each other's market access to food and drink, geographical indicators (GI's) and access to public procurement. The Parties have reached agreement on the text of a number of chapters including trade in goods, technical barriers to trade, good regulatory practices, transparency, energy and raw materials, trade and sustainable development and sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) matters and customs and trade facilitation.

In these negotiations, the EU and Mexico have had extensive discussions towards finding common ground on a reformed approach to investment dispute resolution, including on concepts and ideas. The EU and Mexico are now engaging in further technical work on the legal text in this regard. These discussions are still ongoing and so the final text of the Investment Chapter has yet to be concluded.

A report of the seventh round is available on the Commission's website at http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2018/january/tradoc_156557.pdf. As part of its commitment to more transparent trade policy, the EU negotiating textual proposals are available on its website at <http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=1694>

Health and Safety Regulations

186. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the discussions she has had with the Health and Safety Authority and the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government regarding progress made on the review under way on aspects of legislation relating to regulation of fairground equipment and funfairs and specific legislative provisions relating to fairground equipment. [7995/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Health and Safety Authority is the national statutory Body with responsibility for ensuring that the provisions on workplace health and safety in the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act are implemented so that those affected by work activity are protected from work-related injury and ill health. The 2005 Act places a range of duties on undertakings and individuals to ensure as far as is reasonably practicable the safety, health and welfare at work of employees.

I should point out that neither I nor the Health and Safety Authority have any statutory responsibility for ensuring the health and safety of users of fairground equipment and funfairs nor any role in the regulation of public safety where the operation of fairground equipment, used by members of the public, is concerned.

I am not involved in, or leading on, any review of legislation relating to the regulation of fairground equipment and funfairs or any other specific legislative provisions relating to fair-

ground equipment

I am aware that officials of the Health and Safety Authority, and of my Department, met with officials of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government in May 2017. At this meeting the Health and Safety Authority outlined its role and responsibilities arising from the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005.

I should point out that the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government currently has responsibility for the licensing of funfairs and fairground equipment. In this regard my colleague the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government would be best placed to provide an update on the matter.

Brexit Staff

187. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of full and part-time staff hired under the €3 million allocation in budget 2018 to the evolving Brexit scenario to each State agency to date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7996/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The State Agencies listed below have received an additional pay allocation in Budget 2018 to manage the impact of Brexit. It is important to note however that the work of very many Business Units both within my Department and its Agencies are impacted by Brexit and are responding to it outside of the specific numbers mentioned below.

Enterprise Ireland

Enterprise Ireland were allocated an additional €1.3 million in funding in Budget 2018 specifically for the purpose of responding to Brexit and this is being allocated to recruit an additional 18 Brexit related staff. Recruitment began in January.

IDA Ireland

IDA Ireland was allocated an additional €700,000 in funding as part of Budget 2018 to further reinforce the Agency's staffing levels. IDA Ireland is structured by global sectorial teams to align with the requirements of its organisational strategy. As such, every business development sector and staff member, is focussed on Brexit and its impact, as are the senior management team within the organisation. Recruitment for additional staff has commenced.

Science Foundation Ireland (SFI)

SFI have been allocated €400k to support recruitment and assist in the Brexit response in 2018. SFI are currently in the process of recruiting for the position of Head of International and this individual will be leading SFI's many Brexit related activities. There may also be realignment of other responsibilities within the organisation which is likely to impact the 2018 Budget allocation.

Health and Safety Authority

The Health and Safety Authority have been allocated an additional €400k in Budget 2018 for Brexit. No staff have been hired to date in the HSA using its 2018 Brexit related funding.

188. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of the sanctioned recruitment of six inspector posts for the farm inspection programme for the Health and Safety Authority which have been filled to date. [8031/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Health & Safety Authority recently completed a recruitment campaign for 11 inspector posts, six of which are field inspection posts and these six inspectors will have an involvement in future farm inspection campaigns. All six posts are now filled.

The Health & Safety Authority Programme of Work for 2018 has a target of 2000 farm inspections during the year with three focused farm inspection campaigns. These campaigns will be supported by the use of both national and local media to raise awareness of key farm risks. Year three of the current Farm Safety Action Plan 2016-2018 of the Farm Safety Partnership Advisory Committee will be implemented during 2018 and work will start on the development of a new Farm Safety Action Plan for 2019-2021.

Health and Safety Authority Expenditure

189. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the amount allocated by the Health and Safety Authority for farm safety initiatives in each of the years 2010 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; the number of inspections in each year in the same period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8032/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The amount allocated by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) for farm safety initiatives in the years 2010 to 2017 with an estimated expenditure for 2018 and the number of farm inspections and investigations 2010–2018 are set out in the attached tables.

The HSA originally allocated a budget of €384,000 for farm safety initiatives in 2017. However, actual expenditure was higher at €533,995 due to the allocation of additional funding by my Department during 2017.

In 2018 the HSA has allocated approximately €624,000 for farm safety initiatives. The actual figure expended might vary during the year in response to particular issues that arise in this or other sectors. These initiatives will involve the organisation of, participation in, or support of a wide range of agriculture related events as well as media coverage. The Authority will also engage in a number of targeted promotional campaigns through relevant media.

In 2018 the HSA is also carrying out three focused inspection campaigns each of one-month duration. The first focuses on Livestock Handling and is currently under way. The second campaign on Farm Vehicle Safety will take place in May and the third on Maintenance and Working at a Height will take place in October. As well these specific campaigns other national campaigns related to vehicle and construction safety will have relevance to the farming sector.

In addition to specific farm safety initiatives or inspections visits to farms by inspectors include routine unannounced inspections to monitor compliance with a range health and safety regulations and to investigate farm accidents. In any one year there can be between 60-90 investigations on farms with the rest being unannounced inspections.

The planned target of farm inspections was significantly increased in 2010 from 1,500 per year to 3,000 and its impact assessed over the following 5 year period. However, the increased level of inspection showed no significant reduction in farm deaths.

Since 2014 the HSA has redirected some of its inspection resources toward engaging directly with farmers on other accident prevention initiatives. Research has shown that farmers working in peer to peer groups, such as Knowledge Transfer Groups take on new information, new procedures, and new technology more easily and make more lasting changes in the way they farm when involved with such groups. The objective is to bring about sustainable changes to work practices and controlling risk.

The reduction of farm inspection numbers from a target of 3,000 to 2,000 for 2018 is a planned strategy by the HSA to allow its team of farm inspectors to offer strong support to the Knowledge Transfer Groups. During 2017 HSA inspectors were involved with over 100 such Groups, in addition to farm walks, thereby reaching a further 2,000 farmers through such engagements. The use of Knowledge Transfer Groups will continue in 2018.

In addition, the HSA recently completed a recruitment campaign for 11 inspector posts, 6 of which are field inspection posts and have now been filled. These 6 inspectors will be involved in future farm inspection campaigns thereby helping to ensure that farm inspection targets will be achieved.

Table of Expenditure on Farm Safety Initiatives 2011 to 2017

| Year | Expenditure * |
|------------------|---------------|
| 2010 | €264,000 ** |
| 2011 | €264,481 |
| 2012 | €589,870 |
| 2013 | €449,669 |
| 2014 | €327,953 |
| 2015 | €396,251 |
| 2016 | €416,917 |
| 2017 | €533,995 |
| 2018 (estimated) | €624,000 |

**Note: Annual figures for expenditure include some cross sectorial initiatives where the expenditure is also relevant to other sectors. As it is not possible to extract this it has been included as the full figure.*

*** Note: The expenditure figure for farm safety initiatives in 2010 was recorded on a now defunct financial system and is no longer accessible but was similar to expenditure for 2011 .*

Set out below also is a table showing the breakdown of the annual farm inspection numbers carried out by the HSA from 2010 to date in 2018 (Feb. 13th).

Farm inspections and investigations 2010 – 2018

| Year | Number of farm Inspections and Investigations |
|------|---|
| 2010 | 1,646 |
| 2011 | 3,058 |
| 2012 | 3,136 |
| 2013 | 2,784 |
| 2014 | 2,644 |
| 2015 | 3,056 |
| 2016 | 2,008 |
| 2017 | 1,776 |

| | |
|------|---|
| Year | Number of farm Inspections and Investigations |
| 2018 | 160 (target 2,000) |

Services for People with Disabilities

190. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Health if a matter regarding a school (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7897/18]

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

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

Health Promotion

191. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health the estimated savings to the health sector if alcohol consumption fell by 10%, 15%, 20% and 25%, respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7912/18]

192. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health the estimated improvements in life expectancy by 2030 and 2050 if alcohol consumption fell by 10%, 15%, 20% and 25%, respectively, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7913/18]

193. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Health his plans to give priority to reducing alcohol consumption by 25% by 2030 in view of the fact that it is a major factor in a range of illnesses, particularly high rates of cancer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7914/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): I propose to take Questions Nos. 191 to 193, inclusive, together.

The Public Health (Alcohol) Bill is in the Programme for a Partnership Government and is currently undergoing second stage in the Dáil Éireann. One of the primary policy objectives of the Bill is to reduce alcohol consumption to 9.1 litres of pure alcohol per person per annum by 2020. This equates to a 20 % reduction of the 2016 consumption figure of 11.46 litres.

The remaining policy objective are to:

- delay the initiation of alcohol consumption by children and young people;
- reduce the harms caused by the misuse of alcohol; and
- regulate the supply and price of alcohol in order to minimise the possibility and incidence of alcohol related harm.

These objectives were developed in recognition that alcohol causes harms to health, signifi-

cant costs to the Exchequer and that alcohol consumption in Ireland remains high.

The principles guiding the objectives are that the harms of alcohol make it unlike other grocery products, that consumers should be able to make informed choices about their drinking and that it is time that children and young people's relationship with alcohol was addressed.

Research carried out by the University of Sheffield on behalf of the Department of Health indicates that both Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) and promotion ban policies are effective at improving alcohol related health outcomes. The estimated impact of a 10 cent MUP as set out in the Bill, indicates that among high risk drinkers alcohol attributable deaths per 100,000 drinkers will reduce by 69 per year and among low risk drinkers, alcohol attributable deaths per 100,000 drinkers will reduce by 1 per year.

In terms of hospital admissions, there would be an estimated 5,878 fewer alcohol attributable admissions each year for high risk drinker groups. The annual rate of alcohol attributable admissions per 100,000 drinkers is estimated to reduce by 1,964 for high risk drinkers and by 28 for low risk drinkers. The majority of these gains are in improved chronic disease outcomes, particularly alcoholic liver disease.

Health and Social Care Professionals Regulation

194. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the reason an organisation (details supplied) is excluded from the regulation process by CORU. [7822/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Physiotherapists Registration Board established its register on 30 September 2016. When the 2-year transitional period ends in September 2018 entitlement to use the title of physiotherapist will be confined to members of the register.

In many countries around the world the titles of physical therapist and physiotherapist are interchangeable and their users are qualified physiotherapists. In Ireland, however, the title is also used by a number of practitioners who are not physiotherapists but who have been providing musculoskeletal therapies in the private sector for many years. Physiotherapists are trained to provide musculoskeletal, cardio/respiratory and neurological therapies, working in both the public and private sector. In December last year I made regulations to prescribe the title of physical therapist as a variant of the title of physiotherapist. The protection of the title will eliminate the ongoing risk of title confusion and the consequent risks to public safety. The effect of prescribing the title of physical therapist as a variant of the title of physiotherapist will be to protect both titles under the Health and Social Care Professional Council 2005 Act by confining their use solely to registrants of the profession of physiotherapist and to permit the registration in the register of physiotherapists, on a once-off basis and for a limited period, of qualified users of the title of physical therapist.

Athletic Rehabilitation Therapists are one of a growing number of aspirant professions seeking regulation by the Health and Social Care Professional Council (CORU). Section 4 of the Health and Social Care Professional Council 2005 Act provides that the Minister for Health may, following a consultation process and with the approval of the Houses of the Oireachtas, make regulations designating a health or social care profession not already designated if the Minister considers it in the public interest to do so.

It is envisaged that the registration boards of all of the designated professions will be established by the end of 2018. With my recent decision to designate the professions of counsellor and psychotherapist, CORU will be responsible for the regulation of 16 health and social care

professions.

CORU will then be asked to undertake a risk assessment, in terms of public protection, of the principal health and social care professions seeking designation under the Act and to make recommendations concerning options for their possible future regulation. The question of designating other professions providing musculoskeletal therapies, including the profession of athletic rehabilitation therapist will be considered as part of that process.

Hospital Waiting Lists

195. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the status of an operation for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7824/18]

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 the Deputy directly.

Health Services Staff

196. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health when the public health nurse operating from a health centre (details supplied) will be restored back to a full-time position instead of the three-day service that has been in operation since November 2017; his future plans for this health centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7830/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

197. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an appointment for surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7837/18]

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 the Deputy directly.

Medical Card Applications

198. **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. [7842/18]

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

Primary Care Centres Provision

199. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health the status of the development of primary care centres in Ennis; the position regarding the advancement of these developments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7843/18]

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.

General Practitioner Contracts

200. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health if the dispensing arrangements for those general practitioners who hold a dispensing contract with the HSE and do not meet the HSE's criteria for this contract will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7844/18]

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

General Practitioner Services

201. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Health the reason persons working at a surgery (details supplied) are not being accepted into the Westdoc out-of-hours service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7845/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this question relates to a service matter

I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

HSE Correspondence

202. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Health if a reply will issue to correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7853/18]

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

Hospital Appointments Status

203. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive an operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7874/18]

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 the Deputy directly.

Hospital Appointments Administration

204. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7878/18]

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 the Deputy directly.

Medicinal Products Availability

205. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Health if requests to remove barriers imposed on general practitioners distributing the pain patch, Versatis, will be examined; his plans to examine the provision of pain management options for persons here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7879/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Medicines play a vital role in improving the health of Irish patients. Securing access to existing and new and innovative medicines is a key objective of the health service. However, the challenge is to do this in an affordable and sustainable manner. The medicines bill for the community drugs schemes – primarily the GMS, Long Term Illness and Drugs Payment schemes and the High Tech Arrangement – was approximately €1.8 billion in 2017.

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

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

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

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

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

However, since 1 December 2017, non-shingles patients no longer automatically receive this item under the community drugs schemes. In August 2017 the HSE advised GPs of the changes and of treatment alternatives.

It is possible for non-shingles patients to be approved for the patch through the community drug schemes. The patient's GP should apply to the Medicines Management Programme through the online system, and the MMP will review the application and inform the GP of its decision.

I am advised that the MMP has received over 4,500 applications from GPs, of which some 10% have been approved. For many of the conditions applied for, prescribing of the patch was inappropriate, for example for conditions such as deep venous thrombosis, angina, gout and endometriosis.

Where a GP's application is rejected, it may be appealed. Of some 250 appeals to date, the HSE advises that over 60% have been accepted on clinical grounds.

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

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

206. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for surgery. [7882/18]

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 the Deputy directly.

Disabilities Assessments

207. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the number of children under 18 years of age awaiting an assessment of need under early intervention in County Cork; the waiting time before assessments will be carried out; and the number of staff needed to ensure that all assessments are carried out. [7889/18]

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

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be

referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Occupational Therapy Data

208. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the number of children under 18 years of age awaiting a service plan for occupational therapy under early intervention; the length of time they are waiting; and the number of staff required to clear backlogs. [7890/18]

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

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

Disabilities Data

209. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff required to clear the entire early intervention backlog in each county; the number of staff required in each county; the estimated cost to hire these staff; and the meetings he has had with the HSE to clear this backlog. [7891/18]

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

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

Hospitals Data

210. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the resources including staffing, equipment and so on, required to commission the maternity theatre at Letterkenny University Hospital; the estimated costs associated with providing each such resource; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7893/18]

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.

Hospital Appointments Status

211. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7896/18]

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 the Deputy directly.

Ambulance Service Provision

212. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the proposed capacity review for Connemara will be carried out further to confirmation of an additional ambulance crew of six to eight staff to be allocated to County Galway by the end of February 2018; if it will include all of Connemara; if doctors, persons and groups such as a group (details supplied) will be consulted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7905/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the question raised by the Deputy relates to a service issue, I have asked the HSE to respond to you directly.

Disabilities Assessments

213. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if he will report on the case of a person (details supplied) who is awaiting an assessment of needs. [7908/18]

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

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Administration

214. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health if the home is designated

as a second home for the purposes of fair deal funding in circumstances in which persons who reside in a nursing home and are supported by the fair deal scheme in which their family home is assessed as a second home for insurance purposes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7917/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS), commonly referred to as *Fair Deal*, is a system of financial support for people who require long-term residential care. Participants contribute to the cost of their care according to their means while the State pays the balance of the cost. The Scheme aims to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone and that people are cared for in the most appropriate settings.

Participants in the Scheme contribute up to 80% of their assessable income and a maximum of 7.5% per annum of the value of assets held. Assets include cash assets and all forms of property whether situated in the State or not. The capital value of an individual's principal private residence (PPR) is only included in the financial assessment for the first three years of their time in care. In that regard the PPR is treated differently than other assets, including, for example, a second property.

The financial assessment of relevant assets held, including an individual's PPR, is undertaken as a means of assessing the individual's future contribution to the cost of care under the Scheme. It is important to note that participants in the Scheme are not required to transfer ownership of assets, including the PPR, to other parties including the State.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review

215. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if the fair deal scheme will be amended for persons (details supplied); the status of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7918/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): When the NHSS commenced in 2009, a commitment was made that it would be reviewed after three years. The Report of the Review was published in July 2015. Arising out of the Review, a recommendation was made to examine the treatment of business and farm assets for the purposes of the financial assessment element of the Scheme. The programme for a Partnership Government has also committed to reviewing the NHSS to remove any discrimination against small businesses and family farms. I am committed to this review. However, it is important to remember that the NHSS is largely underpinned by primary legislation and changes to the NHSS will require legislative implementation.

On this basis, I requested legal advice from the office of the Attorney General regarding potential changes to the legislation that will address this matter. The Department has recently received this advice and are exploring the legislative changes necessary and any potential impacts as a result of amending the scheme. It is hoped to bring a Memo to Government on this issue shortly and, subject to Government approval and the drafting process, I then hope to bring forward these legislative proposals thereafter.

National Treatment Purchase Fund

216. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the start-up costs incurred by the reactivation of the National Treatment Purchase Fund in 2017. [7944/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The overall NTPF allocation of funding includes €5m which is set aside to meet administration costs each year. The level of administrative funding has remained the same in each of the years 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017. No additional administrative funding has been allocated to the NTPF in 2018 in respect of the resumption of patient treatment commissioning.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Data

217. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons residing in nursing homes who are supported by the fair deal scheme, by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7963/18]

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.

Occupational Therapy Provision

218. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the status of an occupational therapy appointment for a person (details supplied); his views on the fact that if this report is not made available to the school, this person will not have the supports they require for the upcoming junior certificate exams; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7968/18]

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

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

Mental Health Services Data

219. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of CAMHS hours of service available by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7975/18]

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.

Home Care Packages Data

220. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of health care hours allocated to support home care of elderly persons or persons with a disability by county, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7976/18]

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.

Ministerial Meetings

221. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when he will facilitate a meeting requested by a patient advocacy group (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7999/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My office is in direct contact with the organisation in question to arrange a meeting and a date will be confirmed as soon as my diary allows.

Legislative Programme

222. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health his plans regarding the independence of dental hygienists; his plans to introduce a new Bill to amend or replace the Dentists Act 1985; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8000/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Work is continuing in relation to the development of new legislation to replace the Dentist Act 1985. The regulation and role of dental hygienists is being examined in the context of this new legislation.

A Regulatory Impact Analysis is currently underway, and the drafting of the Scheme of Bill, which is the next step in the process to develop the new legislation, has commenced, but it is at an early stage. It is therefore too early to give an indication as to when the Bill will be published and debated. Department officials are currently committed to drafting a priority Regulated Health Professions (Amendment) Bill, the primary purpose of which is to amend all health professional regulatory Acts as a consequence of the transposition of the Modernised Professional Qualifications Directive (2013/55/EU), and to address a number of other issues.

While the development of new dental legislation is a priority for me, work on the preparation of the Dental Bill will be progressed in line with competing legislative priorities.

Health Services

223. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Health the reason audits (details supplied) have not been published; if he will provide copies of these audits; and when the audit will be made publicly available. [8014/18]

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.

Speech and Language Therapy Provision

224. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the reason for service disruptions to speech and language services provided at a facility (details supplied) in County Donegal; when services will resume as normal; the alternative arrangements which have been put in

place to ensure that service users may continue to access services in a timely manner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8021/18]

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

Cancer Services Provision

225. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health if correspondence from a person (details supplied) has been received; if same will be given consideration; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8034/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The provision of radiation oncology services in Ireland is governed by the National Plan for Radiation Oncology. The National Plan set out the projected infrastructure and equipment required to meet the needs for radiation oncology over a 20 year period.

Radiation oncology is available in five public hospitals: St. James's Hospital, Beaumont Hospital, St. Luke's Hospital Rathgar (which three together form the St. Luke's Radiation Oncology Network, Dublin), Cork University Hospital and University Hospital Galway. Radiation oncology services for public patients are also provided in two private facilities in Waterford and Limerick under the aegis of Cork University Hospital and University Hospital Galway respectively. Meanwhile, patients from the North West can receive radiation oncology treatment at the North West Cancer Centre in Altnagelvin Area Hospital, Derry.

The model of care for radiation oncology allows for the sufficient volume and concentration of activity and expertise to facilitate high quality radiation oncology treatments in line with best evidence and international best practice. Modern radiation oncology is increasingly complex. Delivery of such complex care requires several key components to ensure safe, high quality radiation therapy. These include appropriate physical infrastructure and equipment to meet the needs of both patients and staff, a highly trained multidisciplinary team including specialist doctors, nurses, radiation therapists, physicists and other health and social care professionals and a system of quality assurance that can ensure that radiation oncology services are safe, effective, equitable, efficient, timely and centred on the patients needs.

Future planned developments for radiation oncology services include the construction of new and upgraded facilities in Galway and Cork and the expansion of the facility in Beaumont. In line with the National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026 and the National Plan for Radiation Oncology, it is not intended to establish a centre for radiation oncology in the Midlands Regional Hospital, Tullamore.

Medicinal Products Availability

226. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE medicines management programme decision on Versatis patches will be reviewed in view of the distress caused to persons since the changes came into effect. [8050/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Medicines play a vital role in improving the health of Irish patients. Securing access to existing and new and innovative medicines is a key objective of the health service. However, the challenge is to do this in an affordable and sustain-

able manner. The medicines bill for the community drugs schemes – primarily the GMS, Long Term Illness and Drugs Payment schemes and the High Tech Arrangement – was approximately €1.8 billion in 2017.

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

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

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

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

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

However, since 1 December 2017, non-shingles patients no longer automatically receive this item under the community drugs schemes. In August 2017 the HSE advised GPs of the changes and of treatment alternatives.

It is possible for non-shingles patients to be approved for the patch through the community drug schemes. The patient's GP should apply to the Medicines Management Programme through the online system, and the MMP will review the application and inform the GP of its decision.

I am advised that the MMP has received over 4,500 applications from GPs, of which some 10% have been approved. For many of the conditions applied for, prescribing of the patch was inappropriate, for example for conditions such as deep venous thrombosis, angina, gout and endometriosis.

Where a GP's application is rejected, it may be appealed. Of some 250 appeals to date, the HSE advises that over 60% have been accepted on clinical grounds.

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

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

Aquaculture Licences

227. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of unlicensed aquaculture enterprises in operation nationally; the number of aquaculture licences issued in 2016; if his attention has been drawn to the unlicensed aquaculture on the Inishowen shore of Lough Foyle; if there is progress on jurisdictional issues regarding aquaculture in Lough Foyle; and his views on whether the unlicensed aquaculture along Lough Foyle constitutes an offence under Article 6 of the Fisheries (Amendment) Act 1997. [7828/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Applications for Aquaculture licences are considered by my Department under the provisions of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act, the 1933 Foreshore Act, and applicable EU Legislation.

In 2016, 122 Aquaculture licence determinations were made.

In the case of Lough Foyle, Section 2 of the 1997 Fisheries (Amendment) Act disappplies the Act to the Moville Area, as it is defined in the Foyle Fisheries Act, 1952.

The Good Friday Agreement provided for the establishment of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (FCILC). This body is one of the six North South Implementation Bodies created under the Agreement. The Loughs Agency, as part of the FCILC, has been given responsibility for fisheries related matters in respect of both Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough and the legislation envisages that the Agency will enter into a management agreement with the relevant authorities in both jurisdictions with a view to assuming responsibility for aquaculture licensing within the loughs. Discussions in respect of the management agreement are ongoing.

The management of aquaculture and associated foreshore licensing functions in Lough Foyle gives rise to legal and jurisdictional complexities. Negotiations regarding the jurisdiction of the Lough Foyle area are, in the first instance, a matter for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

My Department organises and participates in an inter-departmental working group which is pursuing a way forward in terms of the future management of aquaculture and associated foreshore activities on Lough Foyle, in parallel with a workable resolution of the complex jurisdictional issues involved.

In view of the multi dimensional and cross jurisdictional nature of the issues involved it would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this time.

GLAS Appeals

228. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in responding to an appeal by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7832/18]

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 payments in respect of 2015 and the 2016 advance payment. The GLAS plus advance payment for 2016 was also processed.

Following an inspection a penalty has been applied to the holding, meaning a reduced 2016 balancing payment issued to the applicant. Further validation checks must now be undertaken

to ensure that the 2016 GLAS plus payment is processed correctly.

The Department has not received any notification of the applicant's intention to request a review of the inspection result.

GLAS Payments

229. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7841/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): All GLAS payments are up to date in this case.

Forestry Data

230. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of Sitka spruce forest plantations over 30 years old, by county; the age and size of each; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7846/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): During the 1930s and 1940s a range of conifer species were planted in Ireland, including Norway spruce, Scots pine and larch, along with Sitka spruce and Lodgepole pine. This reflected the untested nature of the North American species being planted at the time. From the 1950s onwards confidence in Sitka spruce and Lodgepole pine grew, leading to their dominance in afforestation up to the mid-90s, after which the role of Lodgepole pine declined, reflecting primarily the improved land quality available for afforestation after this period and the generally poor form of the species.

From 2006 to 2010 the species composition of afforestation remained largely stable. However the finding of *Phytophthora ramorum* in Japanese larch in 2010, led to its withdrawal from the afforestation programme. From the mid-90s onwards a wider range of tree species has been planted, with ash and oak dominating broadleaf planting. However, more recently, the fungal disease *Chalara fraxinea* was found in ash in 2012, resulting in the cessation of grant aid for this species. Sitka spruce remains the predominant species used in Irish forestry. It has proven to be one of the most productive conifers in Ireland and as such has become the mainstay in roundwood processing. According to the National Forest Inventory 2012 Sitka spruce is the most common tree species in Ireland, occupying 52.4% of the total forest area.

The information sought is not currently prepared in the format requested. However, it is possible to provide similar data that will give an indication of the composition of Ireland's forests as regards Sitka spruce. The total area of Sitka spruce in each county is presented in the following table.

Sitka spruce

| County | Area (ha) |
|--------|-----------|
| Carlow | 3,494 |
| Cavan | 6,946 |
| Clare | 26,919 |
| Cork | 47,078 |

| County | Area (ha) |
|-----------|-----------|
| Donegal | 31,102 |
| Dublin | 2,243 |
| Galway | 27,593 |
| Kerry | 27,070 |
| Kildare | 1,023 |
| Kilkenny | 8,989 |
| Laois | 12,013 |
| Leitrim | 14,138 |
| Limerick | 16,322 |
| Longford | 1,470 |
| Louth | 405 |
| Mayo | 19,413 |
| Meath | 439 |
| Monaghan | 1,931 |
| Offaly | 5,554 |
| Roscommon | 12,573 |
| Sligo | 10,837 |
| Tipperary | 20,290 |
| Waterford | 12,584 |
| Westmeath | 1,739 |
| Wexford | 4,714 |
| Wicklow | 17,683 |
| Total | 334,564 |

According to the National Forest Inventory (NFI) 2012, the following table represents the total area of Sitka spruce above the age of 30.

Sitka spruce

| Age Class | Area (ha) |
|-----------|-----------|
| 31-40 | 42,480 |
| 41-50 | 16,060 |
| 51+ | 2,150 |

Control of Horses

231. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if resources will be increased to local authorities or animal protection authorities to increase efforts to seize horses which are abandoned or left to roam free in housing estates or public green spaces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7870/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Control of Horses Act 1996 provides powers to Local Authorities to deal with stray and abandoned horses and for the designation, by each Local Authority via byelaws that are appropriate to the respective functional areas, of control areas in which horses cannot be kept without a licence. In the context of the Act, a stray horse means a horse apparently wandering at large, lost, abandoned or unaccompanied by any person apparently in charge of it, in a public place or on

any premises, including private premises, without the owner's or occupier's consent. Officials of my Department also regularly assist the Local Authorities and An Garda Síochána in their operations where animals have been welfare compromised.

My Department provides financial assistance towards the expenses incurred by the Local Authorities in operation of the Act, namely in seizing straying horses or horses causing a danger to persons or property. In this regard funding of €7.48 million has been provided to local authorities towards costs incurred in seizing stray horses for the period 2013 – 2017. This funding represents a very substantial support from the Exchequer to Local Authorities, and there are no plans at this juncture to increase funding. For their part Local Authorities should ensure they are achieving best value possible through public procurement.

Separately, my Department provides funding to local authorities to support facilities for 'urban horse projects' and in educating young people in the care and welfare of horses. These projects provide many benefits to communities including a reduction in the number of straying animals as is demonstrated by the number of horses seized in 2017 (1,177) compared with the figure for recent previous years 2,128 in 2016 and 2,683 in 2015.

My Department further funds animal welfare bodies to assist in their work in protecting animal welfare of all species including equines. In this regard, we provided funding of €2.56 million in December 2017 to 111 animal welfare organisations throughout the country, 31 of these organisations work with equines.

My Department continues to stress that it is the responsibility of individuals to ensure the welfare of horses in their ownership and/or their care.

TAMS Eligibility

232. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a person (details supplied) can avail of funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7978/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Both slurry spreading equipment and facilities for the storage of slurry are grant aided under the TAMS II Investment Schemes. All details, including the Terms and Conditions of the Schemes are available on my Department's website.

GLAS Data

233. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons in receipt of GLAS 1, 2 and 3 who have received the 85% advance payment of their 2017 payment, by county, in tabular form; the number of persons who have passed all payment approval checks and are awaiting their 85% portion of the 2017 payment; the number of GLAS recipients who have yet to receive this portion of payment, by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8023/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The information requested is provided in the following table. Please note that the information also answers previous PQ 3878/18 for which the deputy had been advised that the information would be provided when compiled. Payment has issued to all cases cleared for payment and weekly updates are published on my Department's website.

Questions - Written Answers

| | | GLAS 1 | | | GLAS 2 | | | GLAS 3 | | | Total | |
|----------------|--------|----------------------|-----------------------------|--------|----------------------|-----------------------------|--------|----------------------|-----------------------------|--------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| County | Cases | Ad- vance Paid | Ad- vance Not Paid |
| Carlow | 277 | 246 | 31 | 127 | 109 | 18 | 126 | 116 | 10 | 530 | 471 | 59 |
| Cavan | 903 | 843 | 60 | 431 | 385 | 46 | 541 | 488 | 53 | 1,875 | 1,716 | 159 |
| Clare | 1612 | 1,488 | 124 | 687 | 638 | 49 | 811 | 733 | 78 | 3,110 | 2,859 | 251 |
| Cork | 2144 | 1,976 | 168 | 1,002 | 892 | 110 | 945 | 821 | 124 | 4,091 | 3,689 | 402 |
| Donegal | 1934 | 1,797 | 137 | 999 | 907 | 92 | 1,409 | 1,246 | 163 | 4,342 | 3,950 | 392 |
| Dublin | 60 | 53 | 7 | 17 | 16 | 1 | 19 | 17 | 2 | 96 | 86 | 10 |
| Galway | 3063 | 2,684 | 379 | 1,302 | 1,110 | 192 | 1,588 | 1,406 | 182 | 5,953 | 5,200 | 753 |
| Kerry | 1768 | 1,538 | 230 | 868 | 767 | 101 | 765 | 635 | 130 | 3,401 | 2,940 | 461 |
| Kildare | 244 | 202 | 42 | 78 | 61 | 17 | 114 | 93 | 21 | 436 | 356 | 80 |
| Kilkenny | 428 | 383 | 45 | 207 | 186 | 21 | 190 | 160 | 30 | 825 | 729 | 96 |
| Laois | 368 | 336 | 32 | 192 | 184 | 8 | 235 | 209 | 26 | 795 | 729 | 66 |
| Leitrim | 1016 | 945 | 71 | 419 | 380 | 39 | 529 | 481 | 48 | 1,964 | 1,806 | 158 |
| Limerick | 1046 | 970 | 76 | 301 | 266 | 35 | 406 | 370 | 36 | 1,753 | 1,606 | 147 |
| Longford | 511 | 476 | 35 | 343 | 327 | 16 | 330 | 291 | 39 | 1,184 | 1,094 | 90 |
| Louth | 146 | 133 | 13 | 77 | 69 | 8 | 96 | 85 | 11 | 319 | 287 | 32 |
| Mayo | 2549 | 2,187 | 362 | 1,327 | 1,080 | 247 | 1,661 | 1,378 | 283 | 5,537 | 4,645 | 892 |
| Meath | 421 | 391 | 30 | 199 | 174 | 25 | 254 | 224 | 30 | 874 | 789 | 85 |
| Monaghan | 574 | 533 | 41 | 145 | 142 | 3 | 340 | 323 | 17 | 1,059 | 998 | 61 |
| Offaly | 475 | 432 | 43 | 277 | 244 | 33 | 294 | 258 | 36 | 1,046 | 934 | 112 |
| Roscom- mon | 1518 | 1,427 | 91 | 550 | 500 | 50 | 717 | 647 | 70 | 2,785 | 2,574 | 211 |
| Sligo | 938 | 862 | 76 | 363 | 337 | 26 | 493 | 447 | 46 | 1,794 | 1,646 | 148 |
| Tipperary | 1128 | 1,025 | 103 | 507 | 447 | 60 | 506 | 452 | 54 | 2,141 | 1,924 | 217 |
| Waterford | 359 | 315 | 44 | 131 | 110 | 21 | 122 | 102 | 20 | 612 | 527 | 85 |
| Westmeath | 643 | 619 | 24 | 263 | 254 | 9 | 281 | 244 | 37 | 1,187 | 1,117 | 70 |
| Wexford | 758 | 661 | 97 | 264 | 211 | 53 | 304 | 271 | 33 | 1,326 | 1,143 | 183 |
| Wicklow | 331 | 298 | 33 | 151 | 138 | 13 | 204 | 183 | 21 | 686 | 619 | 67 |
| TOTAL | 25,214 | 22,555 | 2,659 | 11,227 | 9,700 | 1,527 | 13,280 | 11,540 | 1,740 | 49,721 | 43,795 | 5,926 |

GLAS Expenditure

234. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason the 2018 GLAS budget allocation is less than the 2017 allocation in view of the fact that the scheme is fully subscribed; and the impact this will have on payments in 2018. [8024/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Firstly, it is important to note that GLAS is a five-year scheme and payments in individual years will vary but will balance out over the lifetime of the scheme.

Annual GLAS advance payments are made in last quarter each year in accordance with the governing regulations with balancing payments issuing in the following calendar year when all inspections have been initiated. Any unpaid advances are discharged as early as possible in the following year. The outturn in 2017 was €195.6m and I am satisfied that the 2018 allocation of €203m is adequate to meet all eligible payment claims.

Fish Quotas

235. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the fishing opportunities for 2017 and 2018 for stocks to which the fleet has access in terms of value in euro and tonnage, in tabular form; the landing value in 2017 and 2018 of same; and the national share of total allowable catches in 2017 and 2018 in terms of value and tonnage. [8025/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A containing the information sought has been forwarded to the Deputy. It can be seen at the following link:

[Table]

Knowledge Transfer Programme

236. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of participants in each year of the knowledge gateway scheme since its establishment; the amount allocated and expended in each year, respectively; and the budget allocations for 2018, in tabular form. [8026/18]

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. Department approved agricultural consultants acting as Knowledge Transfer Facilitators administer groups operating over a three year period. Facilitators who complete all of the requirements of the programme receive a payment of €500 per participant for each year of the three year programme and participants who complete all of the requirements of the programme receive a payment of €750 per annum.

A breakdown of the number of applications received for the Knowledge Transfer Programme is provided in the table.

| | Total | Beef | Dairy | Sheep | Tillage | Poultry | Equine |
|--|------------|--------|-------|-------|---------|---------|--------|
| Number of Participants in year 1 | 20,252 | 10,072 | 4,258 | 4,310 | 885 | 248 | 479 |
| Number of participants in year 2 | 19,522 | 9867 | 4129 | 4073 | 897 | 223 | 333 |
| Budget allocated for each of the 3 years | 25,000,000 | | | | | | |

Payments commenced at the end of October 2017 for participants who successfully completed all elements of Year One of the Programme. To date €16.7 million has been paid in respect of 13,740 participants and their respective facilitators.

Young Farmers Scheme

237. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the new rules and criteria that apply to participants in the young farmers scheme under pillar 1 following reforms at EU level. [8027/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): EU Regulation 2017/2393 came into effect on 1 January 2018. This Regulation included an amendment

to EU Regulation 1307/2013 regarding the number of years a successful applicant under the Young Farmers Scheme (YFS) can receive payment. The relevant amendment is in two parts. The first part of the regulatory amendment provides that YFS applicants may receive payment for five years starting from the first submission of an application for payment, provided that the application takes place within five years of the commencement of farming. This period of five years also applies to farmers who had received payment under the scheme in respect of applications prior to 2018. The second part of the regulatory amendment provides that it is optional for Member States to extend the provision to young farmers who set up a holding in the period 2010-2013, and who had received payment under the YFS in respect of applications before the 2018 scheme year.

Ireland has applied the maximum 2% of the national ceiling to create a YFS fund of €24 million annually. Ireland has also utilised the option to overestimate the BPS ceiling in order to take account of unused YFS funds and this funding was used to allocate entitlements to young farmers and new entrants under the 2017 National Reserve. Therefore the allocation of €24 million is fully utilised in Ireland. If Ireland opted to implement just the first part of the amended regulatory provision it would result in a windfall gain for some Young Farmers Scheme applicants who had commenced farming between 2010 and 2013 and who have already received payment based on the regulatory provisions applying at the time. It is estimated that the additional cost of implementing just the first part of the regulatory amendment in Ireland would be in excess of €5.5 million in 2018 and €7.5 million in 2019 which would result in a requirement for a linear cut to all farmers' basic payments in order to fund this additional spend under the Young Farmers Scheme.

It is for this reason that Ireland will implement the relevant regulatory amendment of Regulation 2017/2393 in full. This will provide for a situation where with effect from the 2018 scheme year, successful applicants under the Young Farmers Scheme who commenced farming from 2014 onwards and submit their first YFS application within five years of commencement of farming may receive payment under the YFS for five years.

Agriculture Scheme Data

238. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of participants in each year of the 2014 to 2020 CAP for pillar 1 payments; the amount allocated and expended in each year respectively; the budget allocations for 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8028/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The required data is being compiled at present and will be forwarded directly to the Deputy as soon as it is available

Brexit Issues

239. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will report on a recent meeting between his Department and the Revenue Commissioners (details supplied); the guarantees that have been committed to by the British Government to avoid this scenario in view of the impact border checks would have on island wide trade in the agrifood sector. [8029/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department is engaging with whole of Government structures for the co-ordination of Brexit prepara-

tions, which include representatives of the Revenue Commissioners, on an ongoing basis.

I understand that the particular meeting referred to took place on 4 January 2018 between officials from the Revenue Commissioners and the IFA, following a request from the IFA. My Department was also represented. The purpose of the meeting was to have a general discussion on customs and other issues in the context of Brexit.

In the Joint Report from the EU and UK on progress during phase 1 of the withdrawal negotiations, published on 8 December 2017, the UK committed to protecting North-South cooperation and avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland. This is to be achieved in the first instance through the overall future EU-UK relationship. If this is not possible, the UK will propose specific solutions to address the unique circumstances of the island of Ireland. In the absence of agreed solutions, the United Kingdom “will maintain full alignment with those rules of the Internal Market and the Customs Union which, now or in the future, support North-South cooperation, the all-island economy and the protection of the 1998 (Good Friday) Agreement.” Such arrangements would require regulatory alignment in those areas of sanitary and phytosanitary rules subject to official control checks at the point of import.

Work is now ongoing to ensure that these principles and commitments are reflected in the Withdrawal Agreement, which will be legally binding.

Question No. 240 withdrawn.

Agriculture Industry

241. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason the Rural Development Programme 2014 to 2020 does not include support for biogas production or anaerobic digesters on farms or supports to persons to meet climate change responsibilities in view of the fact that funding is permitted for investments into biogas plants under rural development programme, RDP. measures available to member states (details supplied). [8033/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The Government recognises that indigenous renewable energy plays a vital role in our domestic fuel mix and will become even more important in the context of reducing our reliance on imported fuels and in meeting our challenging renewable energy targets. My Department is committed to working closely with the Department for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, which is the lead Department in this area, to ensure that the supply of domestic fuels available in the forest and agriculture sectors are mobilised to support energy generation from a range of bioenergy technologies. Anaerobic Digestion is one of the technologies included for support in the proposed Support Scheme for Renewable Heat announced by my colleague Minister Naughten late last year.

My Department, under a previous Development Plan, included a pilot scheme funding the installation of anaerobic digesters on ten Irish Farms. Two projects were completed and a further project has been given extensions to undertake the work by mid 2018, with the extension for a further project currently being considered. While the pilot scheme was not extended, the current Rural Development Programme is directly targeted at supporting environmental actions to assist farmers in meeting climate change responsibilities. The RDP 2014 -2020 will deliver funding of some €4 billion to the agricultural sector and rural areas generally over the lifetime of the Programme. The Programme’s content and design was formulated in light of previous experience and performance and reflects the outcome of extensive stakeholder consultation.

Examples of environmental actions supported in the RDP include supports for Renewable Heat technologies in the form of supports for biomass boilers under the Pig and Poultry Investment Scheme (PPIS) and the Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme (YFCIS). Air-source heat pumps are also supported under PPIS and YFCIS schemes and they may be used as part of a water heater under the Dairy Equipment Scheme. Grant aid is also available under PPIS and YFCIS schemes for solar panels used for electricity production (photovoltaic) and water heating that are permanently erected to buildings used for pig, poultry and egg production.

In terms of future policy, I opened a public consultation process on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post 2020 on Friday 26 January 2018 for an eight week period and am also holding a series of six public meetings to consider the future of the CAP. These submissions and views will play an important role in feeding into the Irish position in the negotiations to come.

Angling Sector

242. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the reason an application (details supplied) was not successful; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7892/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): The consideration of project applications under the National Strategy for Angling Development (NSAD) is a day to day operational matter for Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI).

However, I am advised by IFI that all applications under NSAD are evaluated rigorously, as follows. A quality check is performed to ensure all required support documentation is in place. An environmental check is carried out to ensure projects comply with legislative (environmental, planning etc.) requirements. The local IFI management and staff review the project proposals to ensure that it represents a priority within the region and can be supported from a supervisory perspective.

With regard to the application referred to by the Deputy, I understand from IFI that a number of items were highlighted at this stage of the assessment including access, planning and environmental requirements for the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) where the proposals were to be located and existing infrastructure.

Full panel evaluation then takes place to score the project. This ensures the project meets established and published criteria for, and the objectives, of the funding scheme, addresses a need as identified, confirms that matching funding is available, that it will be done in a partnership approach and previous funding received. This project scored poorly at full panel evaluation.

Finally the NSAD Implementation Group, established within IFI and made up of IFI Heads of Function, review the recommendations and sign off.

An email was sent to the applicant on announcement of the fund in December and a letter posted to their online portal immediately following the decision to advise of the outcome of the application.

IFI would be happy to discuss the project with the applicants should they wish to contact IFI.

Seismic Surveys

243. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount of contributions made by industry, including an organisation (details supplied) to the cost of the €20 million seismic survey conducted in June 2013 by the petroleum affairs division; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7861/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): The Regional Seismic Survey Project is a 16,800 km regional seismic acquisition programme undertaken during the course of 2013-2014 over Ireland's major Atlantic basins. The Project was designed and initiated by my Department and jointly undertaken by my Department and Eni Ireland. Conscious that the existence of quality data is key to encouraging exploration the Project was designed to complement existing datasets and to fill data gaps.

The datasets acquired as a result of the Project vest with my Department. The datasets are of significant interest to exploration companies and researchers and helped inform applications under the 2015 Atlantic Margin Licensing Round. The Project has acted as a catalyst for further seismic acquisition by seismic contractors in recent years.

The cost of the Project was met by a contribution of €3.99 million made from the Petroleum Infrastructure Programme - Expanded Offshore Support Group (PIP-EOSG) managed by the Department and from Eni Ireland's own resources. PIP-EOSG is funded by way of annual contributions from companies participating in Frontier Exploration Licences.

Waste Data

244. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the compensation that is paid to local authorities for road and road safety improvements as a consequence of the limited number of waste facilities declining and in view of the fact that all but one are in Leinster; the way in which it is calculated and apportioned; if waste regions are penalised for not providing for waste within that region; his views on whether the pattern of movement to landfill and incinerator methods is sustainable; if not, the alternative proposals for residual waste and bottom ash; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7928/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Issues pertaining to planning legislation, including matters regarding traffic management and the attachment of conditions relating to individual community gain funds to planning permissions are matters for the statutory planning authorities and do not fall under my remit as Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

Waste management planning is the responsibility of local authorities under Part II of the Waste Management Act 1996. In this regard, waste management plans for the Connacht-Ulster, Eastern Midlands and Southern Regions were made in May 2015. The plans comprehensively set out clear strategies, policies and actions to address the prevention, generation, collection and management of waste in the State for the period 2015 to 2021. The development and implementation of the plans will give effect to national and EU waste management policies and legislation.

European, national and regional waste policy are all predicated on the management of waste in line with the waste hierarchy, whereby the prevention, preparation for re-use, recycling and

other recovery of waste are preferred (in that order) to the disposal of waste. For instance, collectors of waste must conduct their activities in accordance with the relevant legislation and the conditions of their waste collection permits which, *inter alia*, require that waste is managed in line with the waste hierarchy.

The Government's policy of increasing the landfill levy to its current level of €75 per tonne has provided a real financial incentive for waste operators to divert as much material as possible from disposal at landfill. The success of the above and many other policy and legislative measures, including the National Waste Prevention Programme and the phasing-out of flat rate fees for household waste collection, which encourage waste prevention, preparation for re-use, recycling and other recovery, has meant that more waste can be put to environmentally sustainable and productive use as opposed to being buried in the ground.

Statistics compiled by the Environmental Protection Agency show that we have come a long way in a relatively short period of time in terms of improving our recycling and recovery rates and reducing our reliance on landfill. In this regard, National Waste Statistics are available to download at <https://www.epa.ie/nationalwastestatistics/> including the State's progress in meeting targets under EU waste legislation including the Waste Framework Directive; the Landfill Directive; and the Producer Responsibility Directives (Packaging, End-of-Life Vehicles, Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment, Batteries and Accumulators). Of particular note is the reduction in the disposal (landfill) rate of managed Municipal Solid Waste, which fell from 41% in 2012 to 21% in 2014.

Energy Infrastructure

245. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of the proposed Shannon liquefied natural gas, LNG, facility (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7937/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Programme for a Partnership Government makes clear that the Government remains supportive of the proposal to construct a Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) terminal near Ballylongford, County Kerry, and has supported the project promoters in their application to achieve the status of a Project of Common Interest (PCI) under European Regulation 347/2013 which covers Trans European Energy Infrastructure.

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

The Deputy may also be aware that Shannon Commercial Properties, which is part of the Shannon Group, a State-owned commercial body under the aegis of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, has sought expressions of interest in relation to the lands at Ballylongford. I understand that Shannon Commercial Properties is keen that the site is developed and its potential realised. My Department has no role in managing this process, which, I understand is on-going.

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

of future policy measures to maintain the resilience of Ireland's gas and electricity networks and supply.

Departmental Communications

246. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to ensure that a landline telephone number is supplied along with 1850 or 1890 telephone numbers by all Departments including all State and semi-State bodies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8018/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The matter raised in the Question is a customer service issue for each individual public body including Government Departments. The use and display of telephone numbers is an area in which I have no statutory function.

I would draw the Deputy's attention, however, to arrangements in my Department which operates an 1890 lo-call option for users contacting my Department from fixed line numbers and a standard 01-6782000 access code which allows mobile phone users to contact my Department at the standard rate charged by their service provider or within their bundled minutes package. Other Government Departments offering a lo-call number also offer a standard phone number which can be accessed both from within and outside Ireland and which may be less expensive for mobile users to use.

Landfill Sites

247. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the available capacity in landfills (details supplied); the annual licence limit in each; the year in which each is due to close; if extensions are envisaged on these; if so, the planning or licence status; if there is a transition shortfall expected between available space and quantity of waste; if so, when that is expected to occur; the contingency expected; the estimated under-capacity by waste region that each waste region is planning to meet its obligations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8019/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Waste management planning, including with regard to infrastructure provision, is the responsibility of local authorities under Part II of the Waste Management Act, 1996 (as amended). Under section 60(3) of that Act, I am precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to the performance, in specific cases, by a local authority of their statutory functions under the Act.

Copies of the individual licences for each landfill should be available to download on the EPA website, alternatively the EPA may be contacted in relation to queries regarding a particular landfill. Similarly, information on planning permissions should be available from the relevant Planning Authority or an Bord Pleanála. Decisions on whether a facility intends to apply to the EPA, a Planning Authority or an Bord Pleanála to extend its operability beyond the current terms of its planning permission or licence is a matter for each individual facility. Details of applications in progress should similarly be available from the relevant regulatory body.

Notwithstanding the above, in 2016 a situation arose where there was insufficient capacity to dispose of residual municipal waste. To prevent or limit potential environmental pollution, additional available landfill capacity was activated under Section 56 of the Waste Management

Act 1996 by the local authority sector in 2016.

My Department is working with the three Regional Waste Management Planning Lead Authorities and other regulatory bodies to try to ensure that such emergency measures are not required going forward.

Hazardous Waste Sites

248. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the site selection process that followed plans (details supplied); the locations deemed to be optimum; the risk assessments that were carried out for transportation of hazardous waste within the jurisdiction; the locations progressed for the provision of a hazardous waste facility; the reason they did not proceed; if the three waste regions are required to provide for this waste; if not, the reason therefor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8020/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The National Hazardous Waste Management Plan (NHWMP) 2014-2020 is prepared by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in accordance with Section 26 of the Waste Management Act 1996 and sets out the priority actions that may be undertaken within the lifetime of the Plan in relation to: the prevention of hazardous waste; improved collection rates for certain categories of hazardous waste; steps that are required to improve Ireland's self-sufficiency in hazardous waste management and the continued identification and regulation of legacy issues.

It should be noted that there has been no site selection process for the development of a hazardous waste landfill facility undertaken by the EPA or the Waste Management Planning Lead Authorities. The hazardous waste industry in Ireland is owned and operated by the private sector and no public authorities are involved in the commercial collection of hazardous waste, the provision of storage facilities or the treatment of hazardous waste. The only exception is the provision of civic amenity sites by local authorities for the deposit of small quantities of household hazardous waste.

The three Regional Waste Management Plans note the need identified by the EPA in the NHWMP for up to 277,000 tonnes of disposal capacity for hazardous waste materials over the period 2014-2020. The Regional Waste Management Plans highlight that the EPA recognises the value of developing existing landfill sites, including those which are currently closed or un-commenced, for the development of certain hazardous wastes. Accordingly the Regional Waste Management Plans, *inter alia*, support the development of disposal capacity for the treatment of hazardous and non-hazardous wastes at existing landfill facilities, subject to the appropriate statutory approvals being granted in line with the appropriate environmental criteria. The plans do not contain measures requiring the Regions to provide for this waste.

Ireland currently has no dedicated hazardous waste landfill disposal facility and there is no facility for the treatment of thermal residue in the State. While landfill is the least favoured option on the waste hierarchy, it is recognised that relying on the current export model to address this need poses risks for long term availability of outlets. Any proposals for hazardous waste management infrastructure would be expected to have regard to the National Hazardous Waste Management Plan and describe how the overarching objectives of the plan would be met.

Road Network

249. **Deputy Danny Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to replace Listry bridge, Milltown, County Kerry, with a new structure in view of the fact that the bridge was built over 200 years ago. [7876/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the relevant County or City Council, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is a matter for each Council.

Before the financial crisis, local authorities could apply on a regular basis for grants for Specific Improvement Grants for the strengthening, widening or realignment of rural roads, including bridges, where the proposed scheme cost generally less than €5 million. However, the extent of the cutbacks in grant funding during the crisis meant this grant scheme had to be curtailed after 2013 because expenditure on maintenance/renewal was falling well short of what was required to adequately maintain the regional and local road network.

The Capital Plan 2016-2021 does provide for the gradual build up in funding for the road network but it will take some years yet to reach the level required for the adequate maintenance and renewal of the network. For this reason there is limited scope at present for funding projects under the Specific Grant Programme.

Any projects proposed by local authorities for consideration under this Grant Programme are assessed by the Department on a case-by-case basis. All projects put forward by local authorities for consideration must comply with the requirements of the Public Spending Code and my Department's Capital Appraisal Framework and it is important for local authorities to prioritise projects within their overall area of responsibility with these requirements in mind. In this context while Kerry County Council did apply for funding for remedial works on Listry bridge in 2016, the Council has not put forward a proposal for a replacement bridge.

Greenways Development

250. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the planned timeframe for delivering the East Wall-Sandycove walking and cycling infrastructure greenway. [7884/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority (NTA) is responsible for the development and implementation of public transport and sustainable transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA). My Department provides funding to the NTA for the seven local authorities in the GDA for the implementation of sustainable transport projects including cycling and walking infrastructure.

The East Coast Trail, including the Sutton to Sandycove scheme of which the section between East Wall and Sandycove forms part, is a key element of the Greenway Network of the GDA Cycle Network Plan, as published by the NTA in 2014.

Following design work and extensive public consultation on the Sandymount-Blackrock section of this scheme, which received almost 700 submissions from interested parties, I understand the NTA has re-examined certain elements of the scheme and now intends to discuss further with the two Councils involved, Dublin City Council and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, as well as with a dedicated committee that has been set up by the two Councils, to see what the appropriate next steps should be. A more definitive timeline for the project will be established subsequent to those discussions.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred your question to the NTA for a more detailed reply with regard to this particular project. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Projects Status

251. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the capital plan; if the east-west link road investment project has been considered as part of that plan; the costing for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [2269/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Proposals to deliver an upgraded East-West route linking Dundalk to Sligo, taking in Cavan, involve linking elements of the national road network and regional roads along as direct a route as possible. Essentially the route involves upgrade/realignment works on the regional routes from Dundalk to Cavan and on national routes from Cavan to Sligo. As regards the regional road aspect of the proposal, the improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads in its area is a statutory function of local authorities in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act, 1993. Works on such roads are a matter for the relevant local authority to be funded from its own resources supplemented by State road grants.

My Department provided funding to Cavan County Council (acting as lead authority with Monaghan and Louth County Councils) with over €2m in the period 2007-2014 to progress the regional road element of the project to preliminary design.

This year I have given an allocation of €25,000 to Cavan County Council to enable the Council to undertake a preliminary appraisal, in line with the current requirements in the Public Spending Code and the Capital Investment Framework, of the Cavan to Dundalk section of the route. The aim of this appraisal would be to assess the extent to which the scheme or elements of it can be justified in terms of appraisal and advanced for further consideration in relation to schemes for development post 2021.

Taxi Regulations

252. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress of the National Transport Authority's consultation on rickshaws; when he expects a report based on this consultation to be published; when he expects to legislate to provide for the regulation of rickshaws; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7821/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy refers, the National Transport Authority (NTA) undertook a public consultation on rickshaws in 2017. The NTA submitted a summary of the consultation, which concluded on 25 September 2017, to my Department in October 2017.

My Department is examining all potential and viable regulatory options for rickshaws from the perspective of proportionality, public safety and enforcement. The costs and benefits of each approach will be considered.

It is my intention to select a preferred approach for rickshaws in the coming weeks, with the summary of the consultation to be published and any corresponding legislative provisions to be developed shortly after the decision is made.

Traffic Management

253. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to relieve the level of traffic congestion in Dublin city; and the forward planning which will see a reduction in car usage in the city. [7823/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the National Transport Authority's (NTA) Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area provides the overarching framework for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services for Dublin over the next two decades. Addressing urban congestion on both the strategic road network and locally in certain locations is an important theme in the Strategy. The measures proposed are linked to an analysis of current and projected levels of travel demand across the region.

In 2015, Dublin City Council and the NTA jointly published the Dublin City Centre Transport Study which sets out the various measures proposed for Dublin's city centre to ensure the efficient functioning of transport within the city centre. Those two bodies, in collaboration with Dublin Bus and TII, are progressively implementing the measures set out in that document to enable the continued development and growth of the city. Over the last six months, changes have been made throughout the city centre to accommodate the introduction of new Luas services. The most significant changes were the introduction of the additional bus lanes along the North and South Quays last August. In addition, a host of other junction and traffic signal changes has been implemented. In the case of College Green - and in advance of a determination of a proposal for a civic plaza at College Green developed by City Council - the NTA, in collaboration with Dublin Bus and Dublin City Council, have proceeded to reduce bus vehicle volumes passing through the area, which would allow the junctions and signals to function more effectively. These parties continue to keep the situation under review.

As Minister for Transport I have secured increased funding for both public transport services and infrastructure in Budget 2018 which will allow us to address congestion and emerging capacity constraints on our public transport system across our cities including Dublin. This includes an 8% increase in funding for PSO services across the bus and rail networks in 2018 to support the delivery of these socially necessary but financially unviable public transport services.

Following the mid-term review of the Capital Plan, Budget 2018 provides for an increase in the multi-annual capital investment for Ireland's public transport with a four-year capital envelope of €2.7 billion over the period 2018-2021. This substantial multi-annual envelope will allow investment in a number of key programmes to increase capacity on our public transport network, ease congestion and provide an alternative to private car use. This includes funding of over €770 million for the BusConnects programme to fundamentally transform Dublin's bus system, so that journeys for bus passengers will be fast, reliable, punctual, convenient and affordable. Over €685 million capital investment will also be provided for additional rail infrastructure between now and 2021 to provide additional Luas capacity, improve mainline rail infrastructure and progress DART expansion and new Metro North.

Driver Test Waiting Lists

254. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the scheduling of a driving test for a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7848/18]

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

Railway Stations

255. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the National Transport Authority does not have a role with regard to the provision of car parking spaces at railway stations outside the greater Dublin area and the regional cities of Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford; the body that has responsibility for funding and construction of additional car parking spaces at railway stations in areas outside of the NTA's remit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7854/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure and services in the Greater Dublin Area and for public transport infrastructure and services on a non statutory basis in the Regional cities of Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford.

Issues relating to the provision of car parking spaces at train stations on the heavy rail network outside of these cities are an operational matter for Iarnród Éireann which receives exchequer funding for such works via the NTA.

Regional Road Network

256. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if each district electoral division in County Tipperary is allocated its share of the non-national road grant based on the number and length of the tertiary and local county roads in the district; the way in which the grant has been allocated in the past five years, by district, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7858/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of the relevant County Council, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from the Council's own resources supplemented by State road grants. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the Council.

My Department allocates funding at local authority level and allocations to individual Municipal Districts are a matter for the Council.

Tipperary County Council is best placed to advise the Deputy in relation to the rationale for the funding decisions taken within the County in the past five years.

Ports Facilities

257. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the size of Dublin Port; the amount of land in operational use; the amount of land used for storage; the amount of unused land; the number of staff directly employed there; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7863/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The queries raised are a matter for Dublin Port Company and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Sport and Recreational Development

258. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when his Department will publish its sports policy. [7864/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, I launched a public consultation process for the new National Sports Policy in late 2016, which resulted in the receipt of 54 submissions from a wide range of stakeholders including Government Departments, National Governing Bodies of Sport, Local Sports Partnerships and private individuals.

My Department and I have since examined these submissions in detail. In addition, my officials have held a number of bilateral meetings with relevant Government Departments and other key stakeholders during the drafting process in order to inform our decision making on the key challenges that confront the sector and the many complex issues that arise in relation to addressing those challenges.

This detailed evaluation work is nearing completion and I will be in a position to submit the draft Policy for the approval of my Government colleagues in the coming weeks. Once approved, the Policy paper will be published very shortly thereafter.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

259. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when his Department will adjudicate on the sports capital appeals; if he envisages unsuccessful clubs; and if there is a budget to deal with successful appeals. [7866/18]

274. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which applications for capital grants that were unsuccessful in 2017 for various reasons will be examined with a view to possible accommodation in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8011/18]

276. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he will engage with applicants for sports capital grants that were deemed invalid in 2017 with a view to possible success in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8013/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 259, 274 and 276 together.

The 2017 round of the Sports Capital Programme (SCP) closed for applications on the 24th February. In November and December last, Minister Ross and I announced €60m in allocations to a record 1,800 projects under the round. Full details of all of these allocations are available on my Department's website.

In relation to invalid applications, several improvements were introduced for the 2017 pro-

gramme to improve the application process. Measures included a significantly shortened application form, more on-line validation of applications and the hosting of a series of regional seminars for potential applicants. These measures were generally successful with the proportion of invalid applications falling from over one third in previous rounds to one fifth in 2017.

Following the announcement of the allocations, all applicants that were deemed invalid or partially invalid were invited to appeal the Department's decision if it was felt that an error had been made in the assessment process. The deadline for the submission of appeals from applicants for local projects was 20 December 2017 and in relation to regional projects the deadline was 19 January 2018. 149 appeals were submitted prior to the deadline and decisions on these submissions are now being finalised. Decisions in relation to how to redress any successful appeals, including funding for same, will be taken once this work is complete and I expect that all applicants will be informed of the outcome of their appeal in the coming weeks.

Separately, my Department is undertaking a more general review of the 2017 round of the programme including all invalid applications where incorrect or incomplete documentation was submitted. I expect this review to be complete in the coming months and an announcement regarding the next round of the SCP will be made at that stage.

Tourism Project Funding

260. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7902/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): My Department's role in relation to tourism lies in the area of national tourism policy development. It is not directly involved in the management or development of individual tourism projects, which are operational matters for the Board and Management of Fáilte Ireland. While the Department provides funding to Fáilte Ireland to invest in tourism offerings, it does not have a role in the administration of Fáilte Ireland's tourism capital programmes.

I can confirm, however, that my Department has no involvement in the project mentioned by the Deputy. I have had enquiries made with Fáilte Ireland who have confirmed that they also have no involvement with the project.

If the Deputy wishes to provide further details on the project I would be happy to examine the matter.

Bus Éireann Staff

261. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason that an application for Garda vetting has not been processed by Bus Éireann for a person (details supplied). [7936/18]

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

Haulage Industry Cabotage Regulations

262. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the outcome of discussions he has had with his British counterpart relating to legislation in the British Parliament regarding the certification of hauliers' licences and vehicles and its implications for the haulage industry here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7997/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): "The Haulage Permits and Trailer Registration Bill" is designed to put in place a system of UK international road transport permits for UK operators that will then provide the option of mutual recognition between EU road transport permits (Community Licences) and UK road transport permits and facilitate continued liberalised access for commercial haulage – such a provision will be vital if the final EU/UK deal requires a permit system, which will not be clear until negotiations have reached final agreement.

The Bill also provides for the establishment of a trailer registration scheme in line with the 1968 Vienna Convention, to ensure that UK operators driving on the continent can comply with the requirements of those EU countries which require the registration of all trailers travelling on their roads. Ireland already registers trailers, so this is not an issue for us.

I welcome the Bill as a constructive contingency measure in preparation for Brexit. My Department has asked for time to examine it in detail before reverting to the UK Department for Transport with any observations or questions.

The focus of the Government in Brexit negotiations is to protect Ireland's interests and to advance our priorities. In the context of the haulage sector it is vital to minimise the impact of Brexit by avoiding any new regulatory burden for hauliers travelling to or transiting the UK. I can assure you that I and other Government Ministers will continue to work with our EU counterparts, both in EU capitals and within the EU institutions, to protect the interests of the Irish haulage sector.

EU Directives

263. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the consultation he has held with relevant stakeholders regarding Directive 2015/2302/EU; the meetings held; when this will come into effect; and if a regulatory impact assessment has been carried out. [7998/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Directive EU (2015/2302) on package travel and linked travel arrangements is due to be applicable in Irish law with effect from 1 July 2018. Officials in my Department are currently preparing regulations to accomplish this. In 2014, my Department carried out a public consultation as well as undertaking a Regulatory Impact Assessment on the proposed Directive.

More recently, as part of the preparations to transpose the Directive, the Commission for Aviation Regulation (CAR) commissioned a report from Indecon Economic Consultants in 2017 on matters arising on foot of the introduction of the Directive. Indecon consulted extensively with industry stakeholders and trade bodies for the report.

Following receipt of the draft Indecon report, CAR opened a consultation process with travel trade stakeholders to take into account their views in relation to the Directive. CAR anticipates that a final report incorporating the industry views will be completed presently.

Whilst the final report from CAR will be considered, it should be noted that the Directive is a maximum harmonisation directive and Member States are required to implement all of its

measures.

Rail Network Expansion

264. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he plans to meet or exceed expectations in the extension of commuter and inter-city rail services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8001/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the NTA's Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035 which provides a framework for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services in the GDA over the next two decades, proposes implementation of the DART Expansion Programme.

In line with the Government's budgetary framework set out in Building on Recovery: Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2016-2021 published in September 2015, the Government's Budget 2018 provides for an increase in the multi-annual capital investment for public transport with a four-year capital envelope of €2.7 billion over the period 2018-2021.

This includes funding in the region of €230 million for mainline rail and DART capacity enhancement. This will enable commencement of the initial stages of the DART Expansion programme, focussing on additional fleet and extending the electrified DART system. It will also allow further progress to be made on the electrification of both the Northern rail line to Balbriggan and the Maynooth line.

My priority over the next few years is to rapidly increase investment in public transport while also increasing public transport services for the GDA and around the country. Following Government's commitment to public transport in Budget 2018 and the 4 Year Capital Plan to 2021, and in the context of the forthcoming 10 year National Development Plan being led by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, we are gearing up for a huge acceleration in the total level of investment and in the number of projects which we can progress.

Rail Network Expansion

265. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he foresees, in the context of the national development plan, a new role for rail transport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8002/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the Government's ten-year National Development Plan will be published shortly along with the National Planning Framework. The National Development Plan will prioritise key investment actions that protect the quality and value of the existing extensive public transport networks. It will also progress new key capital public transport programmes over the period to 2027 to address urban congestion and emerging capacity constraints in our main cities. Investment in any new public transport programmes under the National Development Plan will be subject to the relevant appraisal processes and value for money tests as required under the Public Spending Code.

The role and potential of rail is intrinsically linked to where people live, work and wish to travel and these very issues form the core of the Government's new National Planning Framework over the period to 2040. The National Planning Framework will form an important context for consideration of issues raised by the Rail Review Report which was undertaken jointly

by the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Iarnród Éireann and published in late 2016. As the Deputy is aware, the NTA held a public consultation on the published Review which helped to begin an informed discussion about the current and future role of rail transport in Ireland. Over 300 submissions were received in response to that consultation process. The NTA has prepared a report of those submissions, which it is currently updating to reflect the additional funding which has been made available for rail infrastructure and services in Budget 2018. Once I have received and reviewed the NTA's updated report on the Rail Review consultation, it is my intention to bring it to Government for consideration.

Rail Services Provision

266. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if consideration will be given to a rapid rail system which might enable persons to commute longer distances by rail thereby facilitating employment opportunities, reduction of road traffic congestion and more efficiency in terms of travel time for commuters in the context of encouraging or stabilising the population of rural Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter [8003/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Investing in public transport as a whole is a key priority for the future. As the Deputy is aware, the Government's ten-year National Development Plan will be published shortly along with the National Planning Framework. The National Development Plan will prioritise key investment actions that protect the quality and value of the existing extensive public transport networks. It will also progress new key capital public transport programmes over the period to 2027 to address urban congestion and emerging capacity constraints in our main cities. Investment in any new public transport programmes under the National Development Plan will be subject to the relevant appraisal processes and value for money tests as required under the Public Spending Code.

In line with the recommendations of my Department's 2015 Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport, prioritisation of the type of investment in transport to protect the quality and value of the existing extensive rail networks is also a key finding of a recent Public Investment Management Assessment which was conducted by the International Monetary Fund at the invitation of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

The role and potential of rail is intrinsically linked to where people live, work and wish to travel and these very issues form the core of the Government's new National Planning Framework over the period to 2040. The National Planning Framework will form an important context for consideration of issues raised by the Rail Review Report which was undertaken jointly by the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Iarnród Éireann and published in late 2016. As the Deputy is aware, the NTA held a public consultation on the published Review which helped to begin an informed discussion about the current and future role of rail transport in Ireland. Over 300 submissions were received in response to that consultation process. The NTA has prepared a report of those submissions, which it has just updated to reflect the additional funding which has been made available for rail infrastructure and services in Budget 2018. Once I have reviewed the NTA's updated report on the Rail Review consultation, it is my intention to bring it to Government for consideration.

Rail Network

267. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his

plans for the electrification of the rail service from Dublin to Leixlip, Maynooth, Kilcock and Enfield and if feasible further afield; if this is incorporated in the national development plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8004/18]

268. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans for the electrification of the rail service from Dublin to Hazelhatch, Sallins, Newbridge and Kildare and if feasible further afield; if this is incorporated in the national development plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8005/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 267 and 268 together.

Investing in public transport as a whole is a key priority for the future. As the Deputy is aware, the Government's new 10-year National Development Plan (NDP) will be published shortly. It will prioritise key investment actions to progress new key capital transport programmes and projects over the period to 2027 and that will be subject to the relevant appraisal processes and value for money tests as required under the Public Spending Code. In line with the recommendations of my Department's 2015 Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport, a continuing key priority for investment in transport under the NDP will be to protect the quality and value of the existing extensive rail networks, including the areas referenced by the Deputy, to ensure quality levels of service, accessibility and connectivity. Prioritisation of this type of investment is also a key finding of a recent Public Investment Management Assessment which was conducted by the International Monetary Fund at the invitation of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

The National Transport Authority's (NTA) "Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) 2016-2035" provides a framework for the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services in the GDA over the next two decades. The DART Expansion Programme which is a cornerstone project of the strategy, seeks to progress a series of projects that will create a full metropolitan area DART network for Dublin with all of the lines linked and connected to provide fast, high-frequency electrified services to Drogheda on the Northern Line, Celbridge/Hazelhatch on the Kildare Line, Maynooth and M3 Parkway on the Maynooth/Sligo Line, while continuing to provide DART services on the South-Eastern Line as far south as Greystones. While it currently does not envisage electrification of existing rail services beyond these destinations, it is subject to review in 2021.

Tourism Policy

269. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he plans to facilitate the ongoing development of Ireland as a global conference and event centre capable of competing with all locations worldwide; if this can be linked into the national development plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8006/18]

270. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he continues to promote Ireland as a sports event centre with particular reference to encouraging such events here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8007/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 269 and 270 together.

Events such as conferences, business events and sports events, are important elements of our tourism product offering and the tourism agencies are continuously working to promote Ireland as a destination for conferences and events.

15 February 2018

Fáilte Ireland's Business Tourism Unit, operating under the brand name "Meet in Ireland", promotes Ireland as a leading conference and business destination. The team works collaboratively with key stakeholders to secure high profile business tourism events for Ireland.

The hosting of major sports events, both participative and spectator sports, can provide great opportunities to showcase Ireland and drive international visitor numbers. In addition, the media coverage of sports events helps to put Ireland onto travel itineraries as a holiday destination.

Accordingly, I am very supportive of the ongoing efforts of the tourism agencies and the national governing bodies of sport to attract international events, subject, of course, to an assessment of the costs and benefits involved in any State financial support, in particular the number of overseas visitors.

Fáilte Ireland provides financial assistance, subject to eligibility criteria, to applicants who are proposing to bid to host international sporting, cultural and other events in Ireland which would attract significant numbers of international visitors. When an event with international tourism appeal is confirmed for Ireland, Tourism Ireland would then promote it in relevant markets overseas.

Ongoing investment in tourism development will be important over the term of the National Development Plan. I understand that the National Development Plan is due to be published on Friday next, 16 February.

Tourism Promotion

271. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the degree to which he continues to pursue the marketing of the island of Ireland as a tourist location worldwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8008/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The matter raised by the Deputy is an operational matter for Tourism Ireland. I have referred the Deputy's Question to Tourism Ireland for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Brexit Issues

272. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which his Department is making provision for the eventuality of Brexit with particular reference to its implications for air and sea travel and in view of the necessity to ensure easy travel access to continental Europe for Irish customers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8009/18]

273. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the extent to which he expects to be in a position to assuage the fears of the tourism and the business sectors in respect of ready, future air and sea travel to Europe; if sea ports and airports are to be developed for this purpose; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8010/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 272 and 273 together.

Brexit and its potential implications for Ireland are being managed on a whole-of-government basis. My Department is represented on all relevant cross-departmental coordination

structures, and an internal departmental committee on Brexit meets on a monthly basis to oversee the Department's analyses and planning as the negotiations progress.

The Government has been clear that its approach is aimed at minimising the impact of Brexit on our trade and economy and an orderly withdrawal of the UK from the EU.

Contingency planning in relation to Brexit at both a national and an EU level is focused on three areas: preparing for a no-deal scenario or so-called "disorderly Brexit"; preparing for a transition period based on the "status quo"; and preparing for the future EU-UK relationship.

In addition to the work on contingency planning, there are ongoing consultations and meetings between my officials, other Government Departments and agencies, and other public and private key stakeholders in order to continue to plan for and mitigate the risks associated with Brexit.

The implications of Brexit for air and sea transport will only become clear once the negotiations have been completed and the future relationship between the EU and the UK have been decided.

My officials will continue to work with the road haulage, tourism, aviation and maritime sectors and stakeholders in order to further identify and plan for the implications of Brexit, including through a number of stakeholder meetings expected to take place during Q1 of 2018.

Question No. 274 answered with Question No. 259.

Sports Capital Programme

275. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will liaise with various sporting groups that have been the beneficiaries of sports capital grants in the past with a view to ensuring that all such grants are used effectively and efficiently and where circumstances in which difficulties have arisen, assistance of a constructive nature will be offered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8012/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The Sports Capital Programme Division of my Department makes every effort to assist sports clubs and organisations to draw down all grants allocated under the Sports Capital Programme (SCP). To this end, staff members are available to answer any questions that grantees may have. Phone numbers for the officials dealing with each county can be found on my Department's website at www.sportscapitalprogramme.ie. Accordingly, if grantees are having difficulties drawing down SCP grants, they should contact my Department in the first instance. If grantees are unable to progress with the project as originally applied for, they may be able to apply for a change of purpose to use the grant for another sporting purpose.

In a limited number of cases where delays are excessive or where there is no prospect of the grant being drawn down at all, SCP grants may be withdrawn. In all such cases, grantees are contacted prior to the grant withdrawal. Any suggestion regarding alternative uses for the grant are fully considered once the other terms and conditions of the SCP are adhered to.

Question No. 276 answered with Question No. 259.

Commuter Coach Parking

277. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the changes that have been made to facilitate coach parking in Dublin near a location (details supplied); if consultation was made with coach businesses when plans for changes were drawn up; the provisions in place to accommodate overnight and weekend parking of coaches; the provisions or alternative parking being made to accommodate coaches elsewhere in view of the fact that the site has been reduced by one third; and if he will reverse the implementation of charges to businesses using the site in view of the fact contracts signed with international businesses and the coach providers prior to this did not take into account these unforeseen outlays and the cost impact on smaller businesses will be significant. [8051/18]

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

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

I am advised that further to an application process, a grant of permission with a number of conditions was issued by An Bord Pleanála in May 2016 in which the NTA obtained five year temporary planning permission allowing operation of the coach park from 7 a.m. to 7p.m. Monday to Friday, with occasional use only up to 12.00 a.m. (midnight) and on weekends for special events.

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

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

Family Resource Centres

278. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the reason there is a difference of up to €30,000 in annual funding for an existing FRC and a new FRC (details supplied). [7836/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, administers the family resource centre programme. I was pleased to announce that, under Budget 2018, additional resources of €3 million were secured to support the work of existing family resource centres, and to facilitate the expansion of the family resource centre programme. Over €2 million was also provided to existing family resource centres in late 2017 for the completion of small works.

Tusla will support the inclusion of 11 new centres to the family resource centre programme in 2018. Decisions by Tusla in relation to the funding of individual centres will have regard to the location, size and catchment area of each centre. It is important to emphasise that the 2018 funding levels will include start up funding for new centres.

The centre to which the Deputy refers will receive over €110,000 in operational funding

from Tusla in 2018, an increase over the 2017 allocation of over €94,000. The centre also received once off funding from Tusla in 2017 of €31,000 for minor works on its premises.

Tusla is committed to using all available resources for children and families in the most efficient, equitable, proportionate and sustainable way.

Tusla will continue to work with family resource centres throughout the country and will consider service needs and funding resources for centres where appropriate.

Youth Services

279. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to increase capacity in the local intervention schemes to engage hard-to-reach young persons; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8041/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): My Department administers a range of funding schemes and programmes to support the provision of youth services to young people throughout the country including those from disadvantaged communities. The funding schemes support national and local youth work involving approximately 1,400 youth work staff working in youth services and communities throughout the country.

I am pleased to confirm that I have allocated an extra €1.5 million in current funding to support the provision of youth services in 2018. This will bring the total youth funding spend by my Department to €58.95 million. The additional funding will be used for programmes that target disadvantaged young people and to assist national youth organisations in their work to support local voluntary youth services.

In 2017, an amount of €525,425 was allocated for the projects and services under Kildare Youth Services, which operates under Youth Work Ireland. My Department provides funding to Kildare Youth Services under the Special Projects for Youth Scheme in respect of six local youth projects in Athy, Naas, Leixlip, Newbridge, the Curragh and Kildare town and a Youth Information Centre in Naas. My Department has commenced a process with national organisations and local services to identify service development needs for 2018 and in order to finalise the 2018 allocations.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, provides financial support towards the running costs of Family Resource Centres, FRCs, nationwide. There are currently two FRCs in County Kildare, Newbridge FRC and the Curragh FRC, which are in receipt of funding. Activities for young people in these centres include youth clubs, homework clubs, and summer camps. Tusla plans to expand the FRC Programme in 2018 and additional funding will also be provided to existing FRCs this year.

Tusla also operates the School Completion, SCP, Programme. Details of the programme and associated resources in County Kildare are set out in the following table. Any consideration of increased resources will be in line with Tusla's assessment of needs of these areas and available resources.

School Completion Programme

| SCP Name | SCP Funding Allocation 2017/18 | No. schools in the SCP | DEIS Status | Total Enrolment for Schools in Cluster | SCP Project Staff | No. Priority Target Students | No. Risk Target Students | No. Students Universal Interventions |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|--|---|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Canals Cluster SCP (North Kildare) | €119,978.18 | 4 x Post-primary school | All DEIS | 2,599 | 1 x SCP Coordinator 3 x Part-time Attendance Monitor 1 x Part-time Project Worker | 60 | 220 | 400 |
| Newbridge SCP | €183,935.91 | 1 x Post-primary 5 x Primary | 3 x DEIS 3 x non-DEIS | 2,393 | 1 x SCP Coordinator 2 x Part-time Project Workers | 133 | 30 | 400 |
| Curragh Kildare SCP | €159,971.48 | 2 x Post-primary 3 x Primary | 4 x DEIS 1 x non-DEIS | 2,216 | 1 x SCP Coordinator 2 x Part-time Project Workers | 80 | 110 | 214 |
| Athy SCP | €127,529.61 | 1 x Post-primary 2 x Primary | All DEIS | 1,612 | 1 x SCP Coordinator 2 x Part-time Project Workers | 75 | 342 | 417 |

Child and Family Agency Staff

280. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of social workers employed by county, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8042/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The information required by the Deputy is not readily available. My officials have requested the information from Tusla and I will forward the reply to the Deputy once I have been furnished with it.

Job Creation

281. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his plans to increase employment opportunities in rural areas. [7825/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The action plan for rural development includes a range of measures which will support enterprise growth and job creation in rural areas. These measures will be delivered across a range of Government Departments, State agencies and other organisations over the period to 2020.

The relevant measures in the Action Plan are aimed at:

- growing and attracting enterprises and jobs,
- supporting growth in specific sectors such as agrifood, tourism and renewable energy,
- ensuring rural communities have the necessary skills to meet the needs of the labour market, and
- supporting job seekers in rural areas.

The Government has set a target of supporting the delivery of 135,000 extra jobs outside of Dublin by 2020.

The latest labour market data published by the Central Statistics Office, for Quarter 3 2017, show that employment increased in almost all regions of the country year-on-year.

All regions saw increases in IDA employment in 2017, with over 50% of the 19,851 new jobs created last year being located outside of Dublin. Two-thirds, 65%, of the 19,332 new jobs created by Enterprise Ireland companies in 2017 were outside of Dublin.

My own Department also contributes to job creation in rural areas through programmes such as the town and village renewal scheme, the rural recreation scheme and LEADER. LEADER is a multi-annual programme which has a budget of €250 million over the period to 2020 and has a job creation target of 3,100 over the lifetime of the programme.

Leader Programmes Funding

282. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount approved for projects in County Wexford under the Leader programme in each of the years 2014 to 2020 by local action group; the amount paid out for projects to date in 2018 by local action group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7856/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): LEADER is a multi-annual programme covering the period 2014-2020, with a total budget of €250 million over that period. €220 million of this funding has been allocated to the local action groups throughout the country which deliver the LEADER programme. The remaining €30 million is available for schemes which will be delivered at a national level.

LEADER funding is delivered through local action groups in each of the 28 LEADER sub-regional areas around the country. The local action group in County Wexford is Wexford local community development committee, LCDC, with Wexford local development company as the implementing partner.

The funding agreement for delivery of the LEADER Programme in the Wexford area was signed on 27 July 2016, with funding of approximately €9.8 million approved over the lifetime of the programme. The allocation for each LEADER sub-regional area is provided for the duration of the programme, rather than on an annual basis, to provide greater flexibility to the Local Action Groups in managing their resources.

As of 14 February 2018, 45 projects with a value of over €1.4 million had been approved for funding by the local action group in Wexford. I understand that a further six projects, requesting over €245,000 in funding, are at various stages in the approval process. There have been no payments made to date in the Wexford sub-regional area in respect of project applications. However, funding will be drawn down as projects are implemented and payment claims submitted.

School Meals Programme

283. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if funding will be restored to three schools (details supplied) in Dublin 11 that have lost funding for their breakfast clubs; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7871/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Funding towards school meals is being provided in over 1,550 schools and other organisations, supporting up to 247,000 children at a cost of some €54 million in 2018, representing an increase of €6.5 million over the previous year.

Funding for breakfast clubs is being provided to the three schools referred to by the Deputy. Funding is based on the previous year's pupil enrolment figures as provided by the Department of Education and Skills. Any adjustments in funding arise from reported changes in pupil enrolment numbers. There is a particular focus on the provision of breakfast clubs within the programme which provide very positive outcomes for vulnerable children in terms of their energy levels, punctuality and school attendance.

In previous years, one of the schools received both breakfast and lunch funding for 30 pre-school children that attend the school for 2.5 hours a day under the early start programme. These children are eligible for one meal per day and funding for a breakfast was approved for the current school year as the children attend the morning session and are not in attendance for lunch. The Department will work with the school to ensure that these pre-school children receive breakfast. A breakfast and lunch club continues to be provided to the primary school children that attend the school for the full day.

If any of the schools concerned have an issue with their funding they can contact officials in my Department to discuss.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Insurance Fund

284. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which a person (details supplied) can make restitution through the redundancy and insolvency section of her Department arising from their previous business which is wound up; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7959/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As previously outlined in the replies to the Deputy's previous Written Questions Nos. 701 on 19 December 2017 and 253 on 20 October 2017, it is the employer's responsibility to pay statutory redundancy and other wage related entitlements to all eligible employees. In the event that an employer is unable to pay these entitlements due to financial difficulties, the Department may step in to make a payment from the social insurance fund, as part of the redundancy and insolvency payments schemes and a debt is immediately raised against that employer.

The Department is obliged to make every effort to recover the debt owed by the person in question to the social insurance fund. They should engage with the Department's employer debt management unit to discuss their financial situation and capacity to repay their debt by an instalment plan. They can contact the unit on (01) 673 4549 or at debtmanagement@welfare.ie.

Child Benefit Appeals

285. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when child benefit will be facilitated in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7829/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):

Child benefit is in payment to the person concerned and has been paid from the date of claim to date, including February 2018. A review of her child benefit claim was undertaken in January; that review has now concluded and the Department is satisfied that the person concerned retains her entitlement to the benefit.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

286. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a person (details supplied) will have a decision on their application for a carer's allowance. [7835/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

I confirm that my department received an application for CA from the person concerned on the 7 December 2017.

The application is currently being processed and once completed, the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Invalidity Pension Applications

287. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application by a person (details supplied) will be expedited; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7838/18]

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 the 29 January 2018. In order to establish medical suitability, forms for completion issued to the person concerned on 6 February 2018. On receipt of the completed forms the claim will be processed as quickly as possible and he will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

288. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) was not entitled to the full contributory pension; the options available to seek an increase in their pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7860/18]

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 24 contributions, covering the period from April 1981 to end-December 2012. According to the records of my Department, the person concerned has a social insurance record of 969 reckonable contributions and credits, and is in receipt of the correct rate of contributory pension based on this social insurance record. The person was notified in writing of their pension award on 2 April 2013.

The person has no recorded contributions for the tax years 1983/84 to 1987/88, 1992/93 to 1995/96, and 2002 to 2003 inclusive, and has less than 52 contributions for some years during their social insurance contribution history. This affects their overall yearly average and, consequently, their rate of weekly pension entitlement.

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.

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 late 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 early 2019. Where an increase is awarded, it will be backdated to 30 March 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Eligibility

289. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an investigation into a carer's allowance payment will be concluded in the case of a person (details supplied); when the payment will be reinstated; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7888/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment, made to persons who are providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

CA was in payment to the person concerned from 2 January 2014. Once claims are in payment, the Department periodically reviews them to ensure that there is continued entitlement.

A review commenced in this case in 2017. As part of this review the matter was referred to a social welfare inspector (SWI).

During the course of the investigation, it was discovered that the person concerned had not fully disclosed her means to the Department.

The person concerned was notified on 27 October 2017 that because of this her payment was being suspended from 2 November 2017.

On 17 November 2017 the SWI contacted the person concerned requesting her to furnish documents. On 5 December 2017 the SWI received some documents and a letter from the person concerned requesting further time to furnish the outstanding documents. To date no further documents have been furnished.

Enquiries by the SWI are continuing. Once the SWI has reported, a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Appeals

290. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the file of a person (details supplied) who submitted a carer's allowance appeal on 8 November 2017 is expected to be forwarded to the appeals section; the reason for the delay; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7895/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

An application for CA was received from the person concerned on 17 August 2017.

It is a condition for receipt of CA that the applicant's means are less than the statutory limit which in this case is €257.60 weekly. The application was disallowed as her means were determined to exceed the statutory limit.

The person concerned was notified on 5 October 2017 of this decision the reason for it and her right of review and appeal.

A review of this decision was requested on 20 October 2017 and following this review the deciding officer decided that her means still exceeded the statutory limit and consequently there would be no change to the original decision.

The person concerned was notified of the outcome on 7 November 2017 and of her right of appeal.

My department were notified on 17 November 2017 that the person concerned had appealed this decision to the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO). A submission in support of the decision has been forwarded along with the file on 13 February to the SWAO for determination.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Eligibility

291. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) is only in receipt of a €202 contributory State pension in view of the fact they have made social insurance contributions since 1964-65; if their situation can be reviewed in the context of new proposals to deal with contributory State pension

recipients; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7926/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned is in receipt of state pension (contributory) with effect from their 66th birthday. According to the records of my Department, the person concerned has a social insurance record of 982 reckonable paid and credited contributions. They are in receipt of a reduced state pension (contributory) based on a yearly average of 20 contributions, covering the period from October 1964 to end-December 2013 inclusive.

The person has no recorded reckonable contributions for the tax years 1968/69 and 1970/71 to 1997/98 inclusive; this affects their overall yearly average and consequently, their rate of weekly pension entitlement. If the person concerned considers they have additional contributions or credits that have not been recorded, it is open to them to forward documentary evidence of the missing periods of employment to my Department and their pension entitlement will be reviewed.

The Deputy will also 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 late 2018 to apply for a review under the new pension eligibility arrangements, and to notify any periods spent caring for which Home Caring 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 early 2019. Where an increase is awarded, it will be backdated to 30 March 2018.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

292. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied) for carer's allowance; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7927/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

My department received an application for CA from the person concerned on 22 November 2016.

It is a condition for receipt of CA that every claimant shall furnish such certificates, documents, information and evidence as may be required for the purposes of deciding their claim.

The person was requested to provide bank statements and evidence pertaining to the cessation of his self-employment, but did not do so.

Accordingly a deciding officer decided that he was not entitled to CA.

The person concerned was notified on 3 May 2017 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal.

A review of this decision was requested on 22 May 2017. Although some documents were supplied on 25 July 2017, there were still bank statements which had been requested outstanding. As a result, the deciding officer decided not to revise the original decision.

The person concerned was notified on 4 October 2017 of the outcome of this review and of his right of appeal.

Further documents were received on 11 January 2018. However, specific bank statements for the period from October 2016 to the closure of one of the accounts are still outstanding.

On receipt of these, the case will be reviewed once more and, if necessary, the case will be referred again to the Social Welfare Inspector.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rent Supplement Scheme Data

293. **Deputy Seán Canney** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons in receipt of rent allowance both nationally and specifically for the Dublin area on 31 December in each of the years 2012 to 2017; the related reductions in expenditure; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7935/18]

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 some 33,400 recipients for which the Government has provided €180 million for 2018. Details of the total rent supplement recipients and associated outturn under the scheme are provided in the tabular statement. Recipient numbers for Dublin are also provided but costs associated at a county level are not maintained.

HAP has been the main driver in rent supplement's base decline since its introduction in 2014 with over 33,000 active HAP active tenancy arrangements now in place. The targeted transfer of those with long term housing needs from rent supplement to HAP is in line the strategic initiative of returning rent supplement to its original purpose, that of a short term income support.

Other factors which have assisted in the decline of recipients include the continuing improvement in the economy and on-going transfer to other housing solutions including RAS.

I trust this clarifies the position.

Tabular Statement: Rent Supplement - Recipient Numbers & Expenditure (Years 2012 to 2017)

| Year | Total Recipients | Total Expenditure €000 | Dublin Recipients |
|------|------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| 2012 | 87,684 | 422,536 | 32,584 |
| 2013 | 79,788 | 372,909 | 29,541 |
| 2014 | 71,533 | 338,208 | 26,453 |
| 2015 | 61,247 | 311,059 | 23,758 |
| 2016 | 48,041 | 275,294 | 20,561 |
| 2017 | 34,378 | 231,221[1] | 16,309 |

[1] Provisional

Social Welfare Code

294. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on a situation facing elderly persons in receipt of a contributory State pension, living alone increase, fuel allowance, household benefits package and a medical card, who live alone in under-occupied homes and who would consider taking in a person to help address the homeless and housing emergency, but risk losing many of their entitlements if they do so; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7960/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The payment of the living alone allowance, fuel allowance and household benefits package (HHB) is considered secondary, or non-primary, in nature which is incorporated into the person's qualifying payment. The effect of the living alone allowance is to increase the rate of payment to such people, recognizing that there are economies of scale associated with living with another person. In relation to the qualifying criteria for a medical card, this is under the remit of the Minister for Health.

These secondary payments are in some cases subject to a means or household composition test. A person does not have to live alone to receive fuel allowance or HHB, however they must only live with certain excepted people or someone who is in receipt of a qualifying payment in their own right. In the case of HHB a person aged 70 or over is not subject to a means or household composition test.

Significant costs would arise if the criteria for these schemes were relaxed to allow persons in under occupied houses to accept tenants without affecting their secondary entitlements. There would also, clearly, be significant administrative challenges in determining whether such co-residents of pensioners would in fact become homeless if they could not reside at the pensioner's address.

While a pensioner allowing another person to live with them might reduce such additional allowances previously held by the householder, the economies of scale from living together should mean that a weekly contribution by the person moving in would more than compensate for any such reduction in payments from my Department.

The criteria for the Department's supplementary schemes are framed in order to direct the limited resources available to my Department in as targeted a manner as possible. The guidelines for supplementary schemes are kept under review. However, any decision to change the requirement for these schemes would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Data

295. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of adult dependants in receipt of a social welfare claim by county, in tabular form across all live register schemes; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7970/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The

information requested by the Deputy is detailed in the following table.

It should be noted that the county level statistics indicate the number of people with an adult dependent on the live register in January at an office located in the county indicated. As the catchment areas of many local offices cross county borders, this may differ in some cases from the county of residence of the recipients concerned.

| Number of persons on the Live Register in receipt of an adult dependant allowance in January 2018 | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| County | Recipients with Adult Dependants |
| Carlow | 803 |
| Cavan | 852 |
| Clare | 923 |
| Cork | 3,334 |
| Donegal | 2,425 |
| Dublin | 9,093 |
| Galway | 1,997 |
| Kerry | 1,537 |
| Kildare | 1,654 |
| Kilkenny | 679 |
| Laois | 1,086 |
| Leitrim | 377 |
| Limerick | 1,498 |
| Longford | 683 |
| Louth | 1,787 |
| Mayo | 1,366 |
| Meath | 1,051 |
| Monaghan | 562 |
| Offaly | 989 |
| Roscommon | 504 |
| Sligo | 454 |
| Tipperary | 1,722 |
| Waterford | 1,292 |
| Westmeath | 1,168 |
| Wexford | 2,349 |
| Wicklow | 1,199 |
| Total | 41,384 |

Question No. 296 withdrawn.

Illness Benefit Applications

297. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a response has been received from the United Kingdom in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Donegal who has applied for illness benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7972/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): Illness Benefit is a payment for people who cannot work due to illness and who satisfy the pay related social insurance (PRSI) contribution conditions. One of the PRSI conditions is that a person must have a minimum of 39 reckonable contributions paid or credited in the governing contribution year. Claims made in 2018 are governed by the 2016 tax year and only PRSI Classes A, E, H, and P, are reckonable for Illness Benefit purposes.

The person concerned made a claim to Illness Benefit and this claim was registered in my Department on 9 January 2018. According to my Department's records the person concerned does not have the required amount of contributions for the 2016 year.

However, the person concerned indicated on the application form that they had contributions in the United Kingdom. This record was requested by my Department on 30 January 2018. Unfortunately, these requests take approximately 3-4 months. When this record has been received the matter will be dealt with immediately and the person concerned will be notified.

If the person concerned is unable to meet their needs or the needs of their household, they may be entitled to Supplementary Welfare Allowance and should contact their local Intreo Centre.

The PRSI contribution conditions governing entitlement to Illness Benefit are statutory and cannot be either waived or modified in any particular case.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Redundancy Rebates

298. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her views on restoring redundancy rebates to businesses which previously facilitated small and micro sized businesses to hire staff; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [7985/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The purpose of the redundancy payments scheme is to compensate employees for the loss of their jobs, where the employer is unable to pay statutory redundancy due to financial difficulties or insolvency. The scheme is funded from the social insurance fund.

Up to 2011, the scheme provided a rebate of 60 per cent to employers who provided statutory redundancy payments to their employees. In Budgets 2012 and 2013, the Government first reduced and then abolished the rebate payment. This decision was made because of the high cost of the rebate and its impact on the financial sustainability of the social insurance fund at the time of the economic crisis. Furthermore, the rebate to employers was paid regardless of a company's financial situation and ability to pay, thus benefitting viable and profitable companies, including multinational companies. It was not a targeted use of the resources of the social insurance fund.

The redundancy payments scheme as it now operates benefits employees whose employers are unable to pay for statutory redundancy. Employers who declare they cannot sustain the cost of redundancy payments, albeit they continue to trade, are required to submit documentation from their accountants or solicitors and to accept liability for the redundancy payment to the social insurance fund. This ensures that the current scheme takes into account both an employer's ability to pay redundancy payments and that the social insurance fund can be reimbursed in the future, through debt repayment if their financial position improves.

A rebate of redundancy payments to smaller businesses would discriminate between employers and may be construed as a form of state aid, as rebates are not the norm in EU member states. Restoring the rebate would lead to higher costs for the social insurance fund and could restrict the scope for expanding social protection coverage, as set out in the Programme for a Partnership Government.

While I acknowledge the contribution made by small businesses in the creation of employment, I do not consider it appropriate to reinstate the rebate scheme on any basis.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

299. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to review the operation of the community employment scheme eligibility criteria; her further plans to facilitate persons on community employment schemes who are not in receipt of a social welfare payment in view of the fact their spouses are in full-time employment or in circumstances in which they may be engaged in self-employment such as farming; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [8022/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Following the publication of my Department's Report, An Analysis of the Community Employment Programme, in April 2017 the Government approved a number of changes to the terms and conditions around participation on Community Employment (CE). The main purpose of these changes, which were implemented in July 2017 was to broaden the availability of CE to a greater number of people on the live register and to standardise other conditions around the length of time a person can participate on the programme.

One of the general eligibility requirements to participate on CE is that a person must be in receipt of a qualifying social welfare payment from my Department for a minimum period of 12 months. People who do not qualify for a social welfare payment do not meet the current eligibility requirements for participation on CE. However, such people may be eligible for other programmes or support to help them return to work, for example VTOS courses provided by ETB's, Skillnet courses funded through the Department of Education and Skills or Momentum courses provided by SOLAS. Those who do not meet the CE eligibility criteria are advised to contact their local DEASP Intreo Office where a case officer will be happy to discuss alternative employment and training options that are available to them.

The eligibility criterion for participation on CE is kept under on-going review to ensure effectiveness in targeting the long-term unemployed jobseekers and other specific disadvantaged groups.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme Data

300. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of Exchequer funds spent funding the purchase of homes by local authorities or approved housing bodies under the mortgage to rent scheme; and the number of homes the expenditure related to in each of the years since 2012, in tabular form. [8016/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

There are currently two Mortgage to Rent (MTR) schemes funded by my Department. A scheme exists whereby a local authority (LA) can acquire ownership of properties with unsustainable local authority mortgages, thus enabling the household to remain in their home as a social housing tenant (LA-Mortgage-to-Rent). The other scheme provides for an Approved Housing Body (AHB) to acquire ownership of a property with an unsustainable private mortgage, which also enables the household to remain in their home as a social housing tenant (AHB-Mortgage-to-Rent). Both schemes assist families with income difficulties whose mortgages are unsustainable, and where there is little or no prospect of a significant change in circumstances in the foreseeable future. Both schemes are part of the overall suite of social housing options and an important part of the mortgage arrears resolution process.

Information in relation to LA-Mortgage-to-Rent scheme transactions during its pilot phase in Dublin City Council and Westmeath County Council in 2013 and annual transactions, broken down by local authority, following national roll out of the scheme in 2014, is available on my Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity>

Information in relation to the AHB Mortgage to Rent scheme is outlined in the following table.

| Year | AHB MTR Expenditure* | No. of AHB MTR operational units |
|------|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| | € | |
| 2012 | 0 | 0 |
| 2013 | €226,567 | 16 |
| 2014 | €381,098 | 33 |
| 2015 | €780,131 | 58 |
| 2016 | €1,794,498** | 71 |
| 2017 | €3,019,338*** | 86 |

* Owing to the nature of the Capital Advance Leasing Facility scheme, AHB MTR unit delivery does not always arise in the same year as expenditure being incurred and is not directly related to the units that became operational in each year.

**Includes 6 AHB MTR transactions costing €186,495 that were funded through Local Property Tax self-funding.

***Includes 12 AHB MTR transactions costing €244,550 that were funded through Local Property Tax self-funding.

Homeless Persons Data

301. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of persons classed as homeless; and the increased efforts being made to ensure these persons are suitably housed as a matter of urgency. [7827/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Official homeless reports are published on my Department's website on a monthly basis and can be accessed using the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data>.

These reports are based on data provided by housing authorities and produced through the

Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS). These reports capture details of individuals utilising State-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by housing authorities.

The long-term solution to homelessness is to increase the supply of new homes and the provision of social housing supports, as envisioned in the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. During the course of 2017 almost 26,000 social housing solutions were provided via housing authorities and I expect similar outputs in 2018. Indeed, the total housing funding provision of €1.9 billion in 2018, is an increase of 35% over 2017.

My Department, local authorities and approved housing bodies will continue to work closely, to identify further solutions and increase social housing solutions, so that we can continue to give those experiencing homelessness the support they need. The long-term housing needs of households in emergency accommodation will be met through a range of social housing supports, including through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme and through general social housing allocations. Progress is being made in this regard and during 2017, over 4,000 adults that were homeless, or at risk of homelessness, entered into independent sustainable tenancies.

In this regard, I recently notified housing authorities of the availability of exchequer funding to support a new initiative to exit homeless individuals and households from emergency accommodation. It is now open to housing authorities to implement a 'place-finder' service, similar to that which has been operating successfully in Cork and Dublin. This service will provide assistance to homeless households to secure a Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) tenancy. Place-finder services will assist such households to seek out properties in the rented sector that are suited to that household's particular needs and will provide access to deposits and advance rental payments.

Local Authority Housing Standards

302. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the estimated cost of retrofitting all local authority owned housing stock to ensure that all homes have double glazed windows, draft proof doors and are properly insulated. [7894/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 58 of the Housing Act 1966 provides that the management and maintenance of local authority housing stock is a matter for each individual local authority. This includes the achievement of energy efficiency, the implementation of planned maintenance programmes and carrying out of responsive repairs and pre-letting repairs. Regarding the number of houses that are owned by local authorities, the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC), in their annual reports on Performance Indicators in Local Authorities, publishes a range of information in relation to social housing stock, including the total number of dwellings in each local authority area. The most recent NOAC report containing this information shows almost 130,000 homes provided directly by Local Authorities and is available at the following link: <http://noac.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2015-PI-Report.pdf>.

My Department is currently supporting local authorities in undertaking an ambitious programme of insulation retrofitting which commenced in 2013. The aim of the Energy Efficiency Retrofitting Programme is the improvement of energy efficiency and comfort levels in local authority homes, benefitting those at risk of fuel poverty and making a significant contribution to Ireland's carbon emissions reduction targets and energy efficiency targets for 2020.

The programme is being implemented in a number of phases: Phase 1 is focused on providing attic/roof insulation and the less intrusive cavity wall insulation in all relevant properties, while Phase 2, which has been piloted in both Fingal and Westmeath County Councils, will focus on the external fabric upgrade of those social housing units with solid/hollow block wall construction.

My Department is providing grant funding of €3,500 per unit under Phase 1 and from €14,650 for mid-terrace to €17,650 for end-terrace units under Phase 2. The grant limits available under Phase 2 represent the more comprehensive suite of works, and includes a provision to upgrade poorly performing windows and doors in specific circumstances.

Funding of some €115.7 million has been provided from 2013 to the end-2017 to improve energy efficiency and comfort levels in almost 64,000 local authority homes. In 2018, the main focus of the available funding for the Programme will be on the completion of the remaining Phase 1 works and formally rolling out Phase 2. My Department will, shortly, be asking local authorities to submit details of their work proposals and related funding requirements for the Programme in 2018.

Local Electoral Area Boundary Committee Report

303. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the boundary between Cork city and county councils; and when new electoral areas in both local authority areas will be considered under a commission. [7919/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): The recommendations of the Cork Implementation Oversight Group as contained in their Report: “Proposal for delineation of extended boundary of Cork City” have been accepted by the Government in their decision of 12 December 2017.

It is my intention that reconfigured Local Electoral Areas for Cork City and County Councils will be ready for the 2019 local elections and I intend to make the appropriate arrangements in due course, informed by the work of the Cork Implementation Oversight Group.

Vacant Properties Data

304. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of vacant and-or derelict buildings and houses each local authority has acquired in the past four years to date in 2018, in tabular form; the number that were subsequently used to house those on housing lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [7967/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department provides funding to local authorities to acquire a range of properties for social housing use. The properties involved can range from those in good condition to those that need remediation and may have been vacant. The acquisition of properties for social housing is largely delegated to local authorities so they can respond flexibly to all opportunities to provide new social housing.

Given the delegated sanction afforded to local authorities, my Department does not hold information on the precise condition, including the level of dereliction, of the many properties acquired over the past four years for social housing use.

More recently, my Department has introduced the Buy & Renew scheme to provide further

opportunity for local authorities to acquire and remediate suitable properties for social housing use and to complement the Repair & Lease Initiative. During 2017, provisional information shows that funding provided by my Department to local authorities supported the purchase of approximately 70 such homes under the Buy & Renew scheme, details of which are set out in the following table.

| Local Authority | Homes |
|--------------------------------------|-------|
| Clare County Council | 1 |
| DunLaoghaire/Rathdown County Council | 12 |
| Fingal County Council | 8 |
| Kerry County Council | 12 |
| Limerick City & County Council | 7 |
| Meath County Council | 11 |
| Monaghan County Council | 16 |
| Offaly County Council | 1 |
| Tipperary County Council | 1 |

I expect that over the course of 2018, further progress will be made in this area as local authorities close sales on properties identified during 2017 and put in place arrangements for their remediation to make them suitable for social housing use.

Recreational Facilities

305. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the actions taken and progress made since he indicated that his Department is reviewing its role in respect of the aspects of legislation relating to regulation of fairground equipment and funfairs and specific legislative provisions relating to fairground equipment. [7994/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 239 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 places a statutory duty on organisers of funfairs and owners of fairground equipment to take such care as is reasonable for ensuring that persons at a funfair do not suffer injury or damage by reason of dangers arising from the funfair or associated activities. This legislation also requires that the owner of fairground equipment shall not make it available to the public unless such equipment has a valid certificate of safety. The organiser of a funfair is required to give notice of the event to the relevant local authority and such notice is to be accompanied by a valid certificate of safety.

My Department commenced an internal review process on the issue of safety at funfairs/fairground equipment last year. One of the issues raised in the review was that the relevant provisions of the Planning and Development Act do not assign responsibility to a specific body to investigate accidents at funfairs. However, it was noted at that time that provisions in criminal justice and in safety, health and welfare at work legislation provide a range of responsibilities and roles for investigation of accidents.

The review of the aspects of legislation relating to regulation of fairground equipment and funfairs in section 239 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, particularly in respect of the specific legislative provisions relating to fairground equipment, is on-going and includes an examination of international practice in the area of regulating public safety.

The drafting of the review report has commenced and further engagement with relevant

stakeholders is envisaged as part of the process of clarifying issues and preparing the report's conclusions and recommendations.

Postal Voting

306. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if a postal vote facility is available for persons who may be registered in the constituency in which they reside but are attending third level education away from home and may not be able to return to vote in the upcoming referendum in May 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8035/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): In order to be able to vote at elections and referendums, a person's name must be entered in the register of electors for a constituency in the State in which the person ordinarily resides.

Postal voting is provided for in electoral law in respect of certain categories of persons who are entered in the register of electors. Measures to facilitate the greater participation of students in elections have been provided for in electoral law. Section 63 of the Electoral Act 1997 provides that full-time students attending an educational institution in the State who are unlikely to be able to go in person on polling day to vote can apply for a postal vote. Form PVS2 is the appropriate application form for the supplement to the 2018-2019 register of electors. This form is available on www.checktheregister.ie.

Disability Act Employment Targets

307. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the quota in the public service for the employment of persons with disabilities; the percentage of staff with disabilities employed at Galway County Council; his plans to increase the quota, further to comments (details supplied) in 2015 on plans to increase the quota from 3% to 5%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [8043/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005, public bodies are required to achieve a statutory target of 3% of employees with disabilities. Implementation of Part 5 of the Act is monitored on an ongoing basis by the National Disability Authority. The Authority reports each year on progress made on compliance with meeting the statutory target for employment in the public sector.

The Authority's most recently published report shows that at the end of 2015, 3.6% of staff employed in public sector bodies were people with disabilities: the report also shows that 4.6% of Galway County Council's employees are people with disabilities.

Policy responsibility in relation to the employment of people with disabilities in the public service, including the proposed increase in the statutory target from 3% to 6%, on a phased basis by January 2024, is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality.

Deer Culls

308. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when a deer cull will be undertaken in County Kerry (details supplied); and if she will

make a statement on the matter. [7833/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Each year, as part of the on-going management of deer populations within the the Park in question deer numbers may need reduction. There is a significant challenge in attempting to balance the demands of agriculture, forestry and conservation with the need to ensure that deer populations occupying the same land resources are managed at sustainable levels, and in a responsible and ethical manner. Ultimately, however, where deer species are increasing in range and numbers, depending on the annual count and instances of damage caused by deer to habitats (especially woodland), culls need to be carried out to ensure that deer populations do not reach levels that would have negative ecological consequences. The Deputy will be aware my Department's regional NPWS staff have conducted several such culls in recent years.

On foot of a comprehensive survey and report in the winter of 2016 on the distribution, population density and population structure of red deer and sika deer in the National Park and a further census of areas of the Park conducted in Spring 2017, my Department commenced a cull of deer there last month. It is hoped to conclude the cull by the end of March. This work will be undertaken by qualified and competent National Parks and Wildlife Service personnel of my Department. The proposed cull is at a similar level to that which was undertaken in previous years.

Ministerial Briefing

309. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of times she has received a briefing from her officials on the issue of the Cork event centre since her appointment. [7859/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Following my appointment on the 30th November last year, I received briefing from my officials on all aspects of the work of my Department including in relation to the Cork Event Centre and I am regularly updated on all issues pertaining to my Department.