

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 17, inclusive, answered orally.

Questions Nos. 18 to 57, inclusive, resubmitted.

Questions Nos. 58 to 68, inclusive, answered orally.

Financial Services Regulation

69. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance when he will introduce statutory rules appertaining to the code of conduct applicable to primary and secondary lenders or their agents (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13650/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, within the remit of the Central Bank's responsibilities for safeguarding stability and protecting consumers, its approach to mortgage arrears resolution is focused on ensuring the fair treatment of borrowers through a strong consumer protection framework and ensuring that lenders have appropriate arrears resolution strategies and operations in place.

The Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) forms part of the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Framework. It is a statutory Code, issued under Section 117 of the Central Bank Act, 1989.

The CCMA is a lengthy document which has evolved to reflect the changing times and situations which have arisen in the area of consumer protection. For example, an Addendum to the CCMA was published to take account of the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015 which stated that with effect from 8 July 2015, credit servicing firms, as defined in the 2015 Act, must apply for authorisation to the Central Bank and that the CCMA 2013 would apply to these firms. The great benefit of the CCMA not being a piece of primary legislation is that it can be amended relatively quickly to respond to changing events, pursuant to Section 117 of the Central Bank Act, 1989, while still remaining statutory.

The CCMA is aimed specifically at the process to be followed by relevant firms, to ensure borrowers in arrears or pre-arrears in respect of a mortgage loan secured on a primary residence are treated in a timely, transparent and fair manner. A key element of the Central Bank's role is ensuring that the consumer protection regulatory framework is fit for purpose so that consumers best interests are protected. To this end, I have also asked the Central Bank to carry out a review of the CCMA to ensure it remains as effective as possible and for the review to be completed as soon as possible.

Mortgage Resolution Processes

70. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if the Central Bank will review its principles for redress and compensation under the tracker examination to reflect the fact that many consumers have employed financial advisers and that this extra cost should be reflected in their awards. [13655/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank's Tracker Examination is focused on ensuring that lenders provide fair outcomes for all customers impacted by tracker related failings. As part of the Examination framework, where customer detriment has been identified, the Central Bank has clearly articulated its expectations of lenders to provide appropriate redress and compensation to impacted customers in line with its prescribed Principles for Redress. The provision of redress is intended to return impacted customers to the position that they would have been in had the relevant issue not arisen and the compensation, which is to be reasonable, must reflect the detriment involved arising from and/or associated with being on an incorrect rate. Such compensation is to reflect the specific circumstances of each impacted customer.

The Central Bank's Principles for Redress also set out that the lender is to provide impacted customers with an additional payment to allow them to take independent legal or other professional advice regarding the redress and compensation offers made to them. This additional payment is to be commensurate with the complexity of the advice required by the impacted customer depending on the individual circumstances of the impacted customer's case.

Another important part of the Examination Framework is the requirement for lenders to establish independent Appeals Panels, specifically to deal with customers who are not satisfied with any aspect of the redress and compensation offers that they receive from lenders. The appeals process is additional to the options of bringing a complaint to the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman or initiating court proceedings. Importantly customers can also accept the redress and compensation offered and still make an appeal to the independent appeals panels. Customers' rights to make appeals to the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman and through the courts are also preserved.

Credit Unions

71. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the steps he is taking or plans to take to create a new strategy for the growth and development of the credit unions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13646/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government has a clear policy to support the strategic growth and development of credit unions delivering the comprehensive recommendations set out in the Commission on Credit Unions Report and the Credit Union Advisory Committee (CUAC) report in 2016, both of which involved extensive stakeholder engagement. CUAC remains an important advisor to me on strategic issues facing the sector.

An Implementation Group which is working to implement the seven recommendations of the CUAC report has submitted papers on long-term lending and consultation and engagement to the Central Bank and is currently drafting a paper on Tiered Regulation.

While there are challenges to returns arising from the low yield environment and low loan to asset ratios, the sector continues to show signs of improvement reflected in growth in new lending, delivering c 35% of all unsecured consumer lending in 2017, a decrease in the level of

reported arrears and an increase in reserves. Total assets have increased consistently for many years and currently stand at approximately €16.8 billion.

There are other areas where support has been provided including the establishment of the Credit Union Restructuring Board (ReBo) and the availability of €250 million for voluntary restructuring of credit unions facilitated by ReBo which oversaw 82 restructuring projects involving 156 credit unions during its lifetime. These newly merged credit unions are now better positioned to harness the efficiencies of their increased scale to prudently develop products and services that their members are looking for now, and into the future.

In addition revised regulations for credit unions commenced on 1st March 2018 which make changes to the investment and liquidity requirements and allow for greater diversification of investment income, including provision for up to €700 million investment in Tier 3 Approved Housing Bodies.

This Government recognises the important role of credit unions as a volunteer co-operative movement and its priorities remain the protection of members' savings, the financial stability of credit unions and the sector overall. The Government is determined to continue to support a strengthened and growing credit union movement. Credit unions are member owned and it is these members, with support from their representative bodies, who ultimately are responsible for setting and implementing their own individual strategic plans, with appropriate support from Government, which reflect the diverse nature of credit unions be they urban or rural, large or small, industrial or community.

Central Bank of Ireland Data

72. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will request the Central Bank to compile up to date data on the number and value of SME and farm loans held by unregulated loan owners; if the Central Bank can compile such data; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13644/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have been informed by the Central Bank that it does not routinely publish specific data on entities who are not regulated by the Central Bank and it is therefore not possible to provide the numbers requested by the Deputy.

I would however refer the Deputy to the Report on Mortgage Arrears which the Central Bank provided to the Minister for Finance in June 2016. The report is available on the department's website and provides details of the total number of loans/value of loans owned by unregulated entities as at the end of June 2016.

Loans can be sold by regulated entities to entities that are not regulated by the Central Bank. In July 2015, the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing) Act 2015 ("the 2015 Act") was introduced to fill the consumer protection gap where loans are sold by the original lender to an unregulated firm.

I should also refer to the Deputy's Private Members' Bill which was discussed in the Dáil on 6 March and which seeks to increase consumer protections when loans are sold by requiring the regulation of loan owners by the Central Bank.

The Government has committed to supporting the passage of this legislation and my officials are actively working to resolve the drafting challenges presented by the legislation in its current form. I understand that a meeting will be held with the Deputy this week.

Under the 2015 Act, if the firm which bought loans from the original lender is an unregulated firm, then the loans must be serviced by a 'credit servicing firm'. Credit Servicing Firms are required to obtain authorisation from the Central Bank in order to conduct credit servicing activities as defined in the 2015 Act.

Credit servicing firms must act in accordance with the requirements of Irish financial services law that applies to 'regulated financial service providers'. This ensures that consumers, whose loans are sold to another firm, maintain the same regulatory protections that they had prior to the sale, including under the various statutory Codes of Conduct issued by the Central Bank including the SME Regulations 2015.

NAMA Portfolio Value

73. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Finance the fiscal rules surrounding the expected surplus from NAMA; if it will be considered a financial transaction; if it will be possible to utilise the proceeds for expenditure without impact on the expenditure benchmark; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13128/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): NAMA was established in December 2009 and its debts of nearly €32 billion represented a substantial contingent liability to the State.

The State recapitalised the domestic banking system at a gross cost of €64 billion, adding around 40 per cent of GDP to national debt. As a result of this, as well as the mismanagement of the public finances, total government debt now stands at over €200 billion; this is the equivalent of over €40,000 for every man, woman and child in the State.

My priority, therefore, is to use revenue windfalls to reduce the debt incurred by public support for the banking system.

Moreover, I am also very conscious that the economy is approaching full employment and it is important that the stance of budgetary policy reflects this - I will not adopt pro-cyclical policies that endanger our recovery.

NAMA currently projects a surplus in the region of €3bn to be returned to the State once it completes its work. Surplus funds may only be returned to the Central Fund once NAMA's senior and subordinated debt has been redeemed in full. NAMA announced in October 2017 that it had redeemed all of its €30.2bn in senior debt, which was guaranteed by the State, but €1.6bn of subordinated debt is still outstanding.

In order to keep the activities of NAMA off-balance sheet, a special purpose vehicle or SPV was established and it holds the debt. The State owns 49% of the SPV, through another entity called NAMA, with the other 51% privately owned. From a statistical perspective, once the senior debt, subordinated debt, and private investors have been repaid then the State would be the sole shareholder and the NAMA SPV would then become classified into the general government sector, having no effect on the general government balance. This is expected to occur in 2020 and at that point in time NAMA will have no debt.

Under the European System of Accounts 2010, any NAMA surplus paid to the Exchequer will be considered a financial transaction. So while it will be Exchequer positive, it will not impact the general government balance. Therefore any resulting expenditure will worsen both the general government and the structural balances. Whether such expenditure would be compatible with the limits set by the expenditure benchmark can only be determined under the conditions that prevail at the time.

Tax Code

74. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his strategy on the EU Commission's proposals to tax digital revenues in each country of the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13626/18]

121. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on digital taxation in particular current developments in the EU; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13621/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 74 and 121 together.

On Wednesday 21 March last the European Commission published detailed proposal for two different Directives on taxation and digitalisation.

The proposals have been prepared by the Commission with limited input from Member States and we will need to study them in detail. The proposals will now be debated, discussed and amended by Member States working together in Council. Unanimity between all Member States would be required before either or both proposals can be agreed.

It is noteworthy that the recent OECD Interim Report on Tax Challenges arising from Digitalisation shows that a lot more work needed before a global consensus can be reached on the issue of tax and digitalisation. Ireland's support for reaching globally agreed solutions on tax issues is well known and longstanding. We have fully supported efforts at EU level to implement globally agreed BEPS recommendations but we have always been more cautious where the Commission have sought to rewrite international tax rules in a manner that moves away from the global consensus.

We believe any policy approaches must focus on value creation – tax should be paid where value is created, not simply where a transaction happens. Given minimum global tax introduced after US tax reform, the debate is not about “fair tax” – it is only about where tax is paid.

The OECD report did not make a recommendation on the introduction of short term measures because there clearly was no consensus on the merit or need for such action given the risks and adverse consequences that can arise following their introduction.

Further efforts should now be directed at delivering the analysis and evidence needed to achieve a globally agreed, evidence based solution, sustainable in the long run and focussed on aligning taxing rights with the location of real substantive value creating activity. It has long been our position that it has been the mis-match arising from different tax systems which has facilitated aggressive tax planning and the only sustainable way to address this is for countries to cooperate globally through the OECD.

Ireland will continue to actively engage with work in the area of the digital economy at both OECD and EU level. We have been a strong voice in the many tax directives that have been agreed at EU level in recent years and we look forward to critically assessing the Commission's proposals in the context of the discussions at Council.

Banking Sector

75. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance if he will reverse the decision by the previous Government to allow bailed out banks carry forward 100% of losses for two

decades in some cases. [13656/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Loss relief for corporation tax is a long standing feature of the Irish Corporate Tax system and is a standard feature of all other OECD corporate tax systems. It allows for losses incurred in the course of business to be accounted for when calculating a business' tax liabilities.

Section 396C of the TCA 1997 previously restricted losses for NAMA participating institutions to offset losses against 50% of taxable profits in a given year. At the time of its introduction the Government had limited involvement in the banking system. However, by Finance Bill 2013, this measure was considered to have outlasted its initial purpose. Due to the State's substantial holdings in the banking sector (99.8% AIB and 15% of BOI at the time) it was deemed to be acting against the State's interests.

Section 396C was repealed to:

- Reduce the State's role as a 'backstop' provider of capital.
- Protect the existing value of the State's equity and debt investments.

With the removal of Section 396C, AIB and BOI were restored to the same position as other Irish corporates including other Irish banks which effectively levelled the playing field.

To recognise the part that the banks played in the financial crisis, in 2013, the Government decided that the banking sector should make an annual contribution of approximately €150 million to the Exchequer for the period from 2014 to 2016. In Budget 2017, the payment of this levy was extended until 2021. It is anticipated that the bank levy could be expected to raise €750 million over five years.

As I have previously stated, I do not intend to change how tax losses are currently taxed for Irish banks, including those that were bailed out by the State, as I believe there could be consequences that would make it difficult for me to fulfil other objectives in respect of the Irish banking system. Concerns I have in making such changes include:

- A weakened capital position for each of the banks that we have an investment in.
- The valuation of our investments are likely to be materially impacted.
- Damage to our credibility in international markets

I would also note recent media reports regarding proposals to recommend legislation that would limit the use of tax losses in banks to a ten-year period. At the time local stockbrokers estimated that such a change would have a material negative impact on the value of both AIB and PTSB of 3% and 8% respectively which equates to a combined reduction in the value of the State's holding in the two banks of over €300m.

Project Ireland 2040

76. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the degree to which he is satisfied that the targets already identified for 2018 and thereafter in the context of Project Ireland 2040 are achievable and that the resultant economic benefit will accrue as anticipated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13648/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As part of Budget 2018, my Depart-

ment forecast real GDP growth of 3.5 per cent this year. The labour market should benefit from this, with employment growth of 2.3 per cent expected this year. Strong employment growth is set to further reduce the unemployment rate, to around 5 ½ per cent by the end of this year.

Recent economic indicators have generally been positive and are consistent with a continuation of strong growth in the economy. My Department will publish updated economic forecasts as part of the 2018 Stability Programme Update in April.

While the short-term outlook is positive, there are a number of risks at present both internationally and domestically. Externally, the principal risk is the impact of Brexit. However the policy stance in the US, in relation to both trade and taxation, is also a key source of uncertainty. Domestically, competitiveness, housing supply pressures and the potential of overheating are among the significant risks we face.

The best way to mitigate such risks is to improve the resilience of the economy. The Government will play its part by continuing to implement competitiveness-oriented policies – including those that address bottlenecks – and ensuring that the public finances continue to be managed in a prudent fashion.

Such policies will have an important role to play if the strategic outcomes identified as part of the Project Ireland 2040 are to be achieved.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

77. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which Home Building Finance Ireland, HBFI, will contribute to delivering more affordable housing stock; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13950/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As announced in my Budget speech on 10 October 2017, Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFI) is to be established to provide funding on market terms to viable residential development projects whose owners are experiencing difficulty in obtaining debt funding. Up to €750 million of ISIF funds will be allocated to HBFI to provide funding on market terms and the fund is estimated to have capacity to finance about 6,000 homes in the coming years.

HBFI will not be directly involved in development – its role would be solely as a commercial lender and therefore will not have any role in designing the housing mix contained in the schemes it funds. HBFI will provide lending on commercial, market-equivalent terms and conditions. This approach would be akin to a bank or private equity investor. As such HBFI will not have targets in relation to social or affordable housing but will provide a significant contribution to supporting the delivery of additional supply of all types of residential housing in the coming years.

While no specific criteria regarding the pricing of HBFI funded developments are envisaged increasing the level of housing output will increase the affordability of housing more generally, which in turn also will have a positive effect on our ability to provide social housing. For example, any residential developments funded by HBFI will be subject to the same planning and regulatory requirements as all other developments. This includes policies relating to Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 and as such, it is expected that a minimum of 10% of the anticipated output of this investment by HBFI will become available for social housing through this statutory mechanism over this period.

Though HBFI is intended to be a debt funder for private residential projects, I can assure the

Deputy that this Government is equally determined to tackle the issue of housing affordability. In January the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government made a number of additional announcements in this regard including the launch of the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan and a new Affordable Purchase Scheme each of which should make a contribution to delivering homes that are more affordable for potential buyers.

Corporation Tax

78. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance the cost to date of the decision to appeal a matter (details supplied); and when the appeal will be heard. [13652/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Ireland has never accepted the Commission's analysis in the Apple State aid Decision and is challenging the Commission's decision before the European Courts.

Notwithstanding this, the Government is committed to complying with the binding legal obligations the Commission's Final Decision places on Ireland. The Irish authorities have engaged fully with the Commission throughout the State aid investigation. This involved a significant degree of legal and technical complexity, and additional expertise has been engaged where required.

The appeal takes the form of an application to the General Court of the European Union (GCEU), asking it to annul the Commission's Final Decision.

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

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

Over the past four years approximately €5.7 million (including VAT) has been paid in total, of which approximately €3 million relates to the recovery process. This includes all legal costs, consultancy fees and other associated costs. These fees have been paid by the Department of Finance, Revenue Commissioners, NTMA, Central Bank of Ireland, Attorney General's Office and Chief State Solicitor's Office. As this is an important issue for the State, the case will continue to be resourced as appropriate.

Motor Insurance

79. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Finance if he has met with representatives from the motor insurance industry with regard to the refusal to insure motor vehicles over ten years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13640/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am aware of the concerns raised by the Deputy and have considerable sympathy for them.

However, as I outlined in my response to question 5785/18 on this matter, neither I nor the Central Bank of Ireland can interfere in the provision or pricing of insurance products, as

these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept. This position is reinforced by the EU framework for insurance which expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. Consequently, I am not in a position to direct insurance companies as to the pricing level or terms or conditions that they should apply in respect of particular categories of drivers or vehicles.

I understand that insurers use a combination of rating factors in making their individual decisions on whether to offer cover and what terms to apply. I understand that these include the age and type of the vehicle, as well as the age of the driver, the relevant claims record and driving experience, the number of drivers, how the car is used, etc. Insurers do not all use the same combination of rating factors, and as a result prices and availability of cover varies across the market. In addition, insurance companies will price in accordance with their own past claims experience, meaning that in relation to the age of a vehicle and the availability of cover, different insurance companies will use different age thresholds.

As promised in the aforementioned PQ, my officials as part of their regular engagement with Insurance Ireland have discussed this matter in greater detail. While there have been no further developments to date on this matter, the Deputy should note that I have asked my officials to try and gather more information on this issue and to also continue to engage with Insurance Ireland on it.

Corporation Tax Regime

80. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to a study (details supplied) concerning the use of section 110 tax relief in the IFSC; the actions he plans to take on foot of the study; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13620/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Section 110 is intended to create a tax neutral regime for bona-fide securitisation and structured finance purposes. It has been part of our corporation tax code since 1991, with significant amendments in 2003. Securitisation involves the creation of tradeable securities out of an income stream or projected future income stream generated by financial assets. The transaction can involve the use of a special purpose securitisation vehicle to facilitate the transaction and issue the securities.

Securitisation allows banks to raise capital and to share risk, and by providing a repackaging and resale market for corporate debt, it lowers the cost of debt financing.

The section 110 regime was designed to improve Ireland's offering as a location for the conduct of financial services. It has achieved that broad goal and the financial services industry now makes use of these vehicles as a support to financial intermediation. Such financing is useful for the productive economy as it can underpin the supply of finance to industries and companies in Ireland, Europe and further afield.

Ireland is not unique in having a specific regime for securitisations. The importance of securitisation has been recognised by the European Commission through their work on the Capital Markets Union. This is a European Commission initiative to mobilise capital in Europe. A main objective of which is to build a sustainable securitisation regime across the European Union. The Capital Markets Union specifically states how alternative sources of finance are more widely used in other parts of the world, and the widely held view is that should play a bigger role in providing financing to companies that struggle to get funding, especially SMEs

and start-ups.

In relation to the study mentioned, I am not in a position to comment on individual taxpayers.

Insurance Costs

81. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the latest report of the Cost of Insurance Working Group; if the role of profit of the insurance industry in increasing premiums has been considered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13660/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Finance, I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I, nor the Central Bank of Ireland, have the power to direct insurance companies on the pricing of insurance products. Indeed, the EU framework for insurance expressly prohibits Member States from adopting rules which require insurance companies to obtain prior approval of the pricing or terms and conditions of insurance products. The provision of insurance cover and the price at which it is offered is a commercial matter for insurance companies and is based on an assessment of the risks they are willing to accept and adequate provisioning to meet those risks.

The latest Cost of Insurance Working Group Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance builds on the recommendations and actions set down in the Motor Report with a particular focus on increasing transparency, reviewing the level of damages in personal injury cases and improving the personal injuries litigation framework. In broad terms, one of the main objectives of both Reports is to try and address the issue of consistency of award levels, through adherence to the Book of Quantum, no matter where an award is made. If such a consistency of awards is applied in a broad sense, particularly for soft tissue injuries, it will have two very significant effects: (i) there will be less reason for cases to go to litigation, as the level of awards granted by the courts will be aligned in general with those provided by PIAB; this in turn should mean a reduction in legal costs and (ii) a stable claims and awards environment will mean that the reserves put aside by insurers to meet future claims do not have to be regularly adjusted to reflect new developments, such as increases in award levels.

Finally, while I have no doubt that higher premiums have been a contributory factor to the recent return to profitability of some companies, this has followed a number of years where in some instances significant losses have occurred. What we need is a more stable market from both a pricing and profit perspective rather than the volatility we have had in recent years. In this regard, I believe that the implementation of the Cost of Insurance Working Group's Reports will help ensure that the insurance sector is stable and consistent, making it more attractive to new entrants, resulting in more competition and more affordable prices.

Illicit Trade

82. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to introduce additional measures to deal with cross-Border illegal trading in products such as fuels and tobacco; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13920/18]

120. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to introduce additional measures to counteract illegal trading in goods such as tobacco and fuels; if such measures will be introduced in cooperation with the authorities in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13923/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 82 and 120 together.

The threat that fuel fraud and the illicit tobacco trade pose to legitimate business, to consumers and the Exchequer is recognised and I am advised by Revenue that tackling such criminal activity has been one of their priorities over recent years.

Revenue's strategy for combatting the illegal fuel trade has included the introduction of stringent supply chain controls and reporting requirements for fuel transactions to minimise the scope for fraud. It also included a programme of enforcement action, underpinned by legislative changes including a "reckless trading" provision under excise law for oil traders, that have been introduced over a number of Finance Acts, to strengthen Revenue's powers for dealing with this kind of fraud. In addition, Revenue and HM Revenue and Customs in the United Kingdom undertook a joint initiative to introduce from the beginning of April 2015, in Ireland and the United Kingdom, a new fiscal marker for use in marked fuels.

I understand that the industry view is that the measures implemented to date have been successful in significantly curtailing fuel fraud in Ireland. This view is supported by a significant increase in tax revenues from road diesel in recent years. I am also advised that Revenue conducted National Random Sampling Programmes in 2016, 2017 and 2018 with a view to obtaining an updated picture of the extent of the fuel laundering problem. The programmes involved selecting a random sample comprising nearly one in every ten of the 2,500 holders of Auto Fuel Trader Licences (any trader that produces, sells, deals in, or keeps for sale or delivery road diesel is legally obliged to hold such a licence). Road diesel samples were taken from all traders in the programme and tested for the presence of the marker introduced in 2015. In all three years, no evidence of this marker was found in any of the samples tested. This constitutes persuasive evidence that the strategy undertaken in recent years has resulted in the near elimination of selling of laundered product at retail level. The available evidence to date indicates that Accutrace cannot be laundered by conventional methods.

I am advised by Revenue that while the effectiveness of the measures introduced over the last few years is very welcome as is and the very positive outcome of the collaboration with HMRC, Revenue is not complacent and is mindful of the resourcefulness of those involved in criminality in the fuel trade. Revenue remains vigilant and ready to respond to any new developments in this area.

Action is taken against all aspects of the illegal tobacco trade and includes a range of measures to identify and target persons engaged in the supply or sale of illicit products, with a view to seizing the illicit products and prosecuting those involved. Revenue's multifaceted strategy encompasses ongoing analysis of the nature and extent of the problem, the use of analytics and detection technologies, optimising the deployment of resources and extensive cooperation (including the development and sharing of intelligence) on a national, EU and international basis.

A combination of risk analysis, profiling and intelligence and the risk based screening of cargo, vehicles, baggage and postal packages contribute to the effectiveness of Revenue's goal of intercepting the supply of illicit tobacco products. Revenue also targets the illicit trade in tobacco at post-importation level by carrying out intelligence-based operations and random checks at retail outlets, markets and private and commercial premises. Action has also been taken through Finance Acts over recent years to ensure that Revenue has the statutory powers necessary for undertaking its important work against the illegal tobacco trade.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Revenue, who in a joint operation with An Garda Síochána, as part of the Joint Agency Task Force, last week closed down an illicit commercial cigarette factory in Jenkinstown, Co. Louth. I understand from Revenue that this

was the first time a commercial illicit cigarette production plant was discovered in the State and the factory was in full operation when Revenue officers and the Armed Support Unit of An Garda Síochána entered the premises. Revenue officers found more than 60 tonnes of tobacco, all the pre-cursor components for the manufacture of cigarettes, and approximately 25 million cigarettes ready for distribution. This was a sophisticated self-contained operation with machinery capable of producing 250,000 illicit cigarettes per hour and pre-processing, processing and packaging facilities, along with living quarters.

In assessing the overall effectiveness in tackling the illegal tobacco trade, a reliable measure is provided by the annual surveys of illegal tobacco products carried out by IPSOS/MRBI for Revenue and the National Tobacco Control Office of the Health Services Executive. The survey in 2017 found that 13% of cigarette packs encountered in the course of the project were illicit. This figure is slightly up from the levels of 12% and 10% reported in 2015 and 2016 respectively but is nevertheless lower than in earlier years.

Revenue works closely with an An Garda Síochána in acting against fuel and tobacco fraud, and the relevant authorities in the State also work closely with their counterparts in Northern Ireland, through cross-border enforcement groups, to target the organised crime groups responsible for a large proportion of this criminal activity. This work is being supported and facilitated by the setting up in 2016, in the framework of “A Fresh Start: the Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan”, of a Joint Agency Task Force, which includes Revenue as well as An Garda Síochána and their Northern Ireland counterparts. Revenue also works in close cooperation with the relevant authorities in other jurisdictions, the European Anti-Fraud Office and other international bodies and agencies in the ongoing programmes of action at international level to combat both the illicit fuel and tobacco trades.

I am satisfied that Revenue’s work against fuel fraud and the illicit tobacco trade has achieved a considerable level of success, and I am assured that action in these areas will continue to be a high priority. In addition, I can say to the Deputy that I will give careful consideration to any further proposals for legislative change that may be brought forward by Revenue to enhance their capacity to deal effectively with fraud and criminality in these areas.

Brexit Issues

83. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Finance the economic impact assessments his Department has commissioned on Brexit. [5754/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department has been to the fore in producing and funding a number of Brexit-related studies, both before and since the UK’s referendum decision. In addition, regular updates of my Department’s macroeconomic forecasts take account of the impact of Brexit. Published and commissioned Brexit-related studies by my Department include:

- ‘Scoping the Possible Economic Implications of Brexit on Ireland’ – A scoping study of scenarios for the future relationship between the UK and the EU. Published under the Department of Finance-ESRI research programme in **November 2015**;

- ‘An Exposure Analysis of Sectors of the Irish Economy’ – An in-depth analysis of the possible sectoral and regional impacts of Brexit arising from Ireland’s trade relationship with the UK, published by Department of Finance in **October 2016** (Updated March 2017);

- ‘Modelling the Medium to Long Term Potential Macroeconomic Impact of Brexit on Ireland’ – Published under the Department of Finance-ESRI research programme in **Novem-**

ber 2016; and

- ‘Trade Exposures of Sectors of the Irish Economy in a European Context’ – An analysis of trade exposure to the UK in comparison to other EU Member States, published by the Department of Finance in **September 2017**.

The results in these studies show that the potential impact of Brexit on the Irish economy will be significant. Estimates from the macroeconomic modelling work with the ESRI project that, ten years after Brexit, in a WTO environment the level of Irish output could be as much as 3.8 per cent below a baseline of what it otherwise would have been. Projections by Copenhagen Economics, on behalf of the Department of Business Enterprise and Innovation, which my officials inputted into, suggest that the impacts could be higher if the EU and UK significantly diverge from one another in terms of regulatory standards.

Of course these projections are on a no policy change basis. However, with the future trade path between the UK and EU still unknown, it is crucially important that we prepare our economy for the challenges ahead.

In this context, the Government has already taken a number of important steps including in Budgets 2017 and 2018, the Action Plan for Jobs, Ireland Connected, our Trade and Investment Strategy, and the preparation of a new 10-year Capital Plan. The best way to deal with the uncertainties arising from Brexit is to continue the Government’s competitiveness oriented policies and prudent management of the public finances.

Insurance Costs

84. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance the timeframe to implement the report on the cost of employer and public liability insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13651/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The second phase of the Cost of Insurance Working Group project culminated in the publication on January 25th of the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance, following its approval by Government. This new Report makes 15 recommendations with 29 associated actions to be carried out, detailed in an Action Plan contained in the Report with agreed timelines for implementation.

All 29 actions are scheduled to be implemented before the end of 2019, with 26 due for completion this year. The following numbers of actions are due in each respective quarter:

- Q1 2018: 8 actions
- Q2 2018: 7 actions
- Q3 2018: 4 actions
- Q4 2018: 7 actions
- Q1 2019: 1 action
- Q2 2019: 1 action
- Q4 2019: 1 action (no action is due in Q3 2019)

The recommendations, covering three main themes, include actions to:

- **Increase Transparency:** enhance levels of transparency and improve data sharing and collection processes,

- **Review the level of damages in personal injury cases:** request that the Law Reform Commission undertake a detailed analysis of the possibility of developing constitutionally sound legislation to delimit or cap the amounts of damages which a court may award in respect of some or all categories of personal injuries, and

- **Improve the personal injuries litigation framework:** through a number of measures, including:

1. ensuring potential defendants are notified in sufficient time that an incident has occurred in relation to which a claim is going to be made against their policy;

2. tackling fraudulent and exaggerated claims; and ensuring suitable training and information supports are available to the Judiciary to assist in the fair and consistent assessment and awarding of damages in personal injury cases.

The Working Group will focus during 2018 on carrying out the recommendations of the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance in parallel with the continuing implementation of the 2017 Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance. I am hopeful that the cumulative effect of the completion of the two reports' recommendations will be increased stability in the pricing of insurance for businesses and improved availability of liability insurance for all types of bodies.

Insurance Costs

85. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Finance the engagement from his Department with insurance companies on the refusal of motor insurers and the excessive loading of insurance to young persons and those in retirement age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13639/18]

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

However, I am aware of the issue raised by the Deputy. I have received representations to the effect that some policyholders, like younger or older drivers, are continuing to experience increases in their insurance premiums in spite of the fact that prices are generally in decline, while there also have also been a number of Parliamentary Questions tabled on the topic.

With regard to older drivers in particular, Minister of State D'Arcy has written to Insurance Ireland. No formal response has been received to date, however in discussions between officials and Insurance Ireland, they indicated that they had not discerned a particular trend from enquiries received through its helpline in relation to this topic.

Insurance Ireland has also pointed out that in making their individual decisions on whether to offer cover and what terms to apply, insurers will, aside from the driver's age, use a combination of other rating factors, which include the age and type of the vehicle, the relevant claims record and driving experience, the number of drivers, how the car is used, etc. Insurance Ireland has also advised that insurers do not all use the same combination of rating factors, and as a result prices and availability of cover varies across the market. In addition to the above factors, insurance companies will price in accordance with their own overall past claims experience. Unfortunately, particularly in relation to younger drivers this has not always been positive.

Finally, I would recommend drivers who are quoted increased premiums to consult the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission website, which has an informative section regarding the purchase of car insurance generally. One of the key tips listed to help cut costs is to "shop around" and "always get quotes from several insurance providers when you need to get or renew insurance".

Credit Union Services

86. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance the work being undertaken by his Department to implement the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach's recommendation that credit unions be able to lend to affordable housing bodies and local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13624/18]

97. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department is examining an amendment to the Credit Union and Co-operation with Overseas Regulators Act 2012 to allow credit unions lend to affordable housing bodies and local authorities as recommended by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13619/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 86 and 97 together.

The common bond restrictions limit the potential for credit unions to lend to housing bodies and local authorities, either directly or on a syndicated basis.

As previously set out in my reply to parliamentary question No. 55 for written answer on 22nd February 2018, the Credit Union and Co-Operation with Overseas Regulators Act 2012 introduced changes to the Credit Union Act, 1997 (the 1997 Act). Since 1 January 2016, section 43 of the 1997 Act provides that the Central Bank may prescribe investments in which a credit union may invest its funds.

The Central Bank undertook a review of the investment framework for credit unions in 2017. This review resulted in the publication of Consultation Paper 109 (CP109) which consulted on potential changes to the investment framework for credit unions. One of the proposals in CP109 was that credit unions be permitted to provide funding for the provision of social housing to Tier 3 Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs).

Submissions to CP109 were broadly supportive of credit unions providing funding to Tier 3 AHBs. Taking account of the feedback provided to CP109, amended regulations commenced on 1 March 2018 which permit credit unions to provide funding to Tier 3 AHBs for the provision of social housing. The maximum permitted investment amount per credit union is 50% of regulatory reserves where a credit union has total assets of at least €100 million and 25% of regulatory reserves for all other credit unions. These limits may facilitate a combined sector investment in Tier 3 AHBs of close to €700 million.

The Central Bank is open to considering further investment proposals. Where the Central Bank receives detailed proposals which can demonstrate that an investment could fall within the appropriate risk profile for credit union investments, it will consider further amendments to the investment regulations to facilitate such investments in the future.

The Central Bank has committed to undertaking and publishing analysis of credit union sector investments, two years post commencement of the amending investment regulations for credit unions, to assess and analyse the actual impact which the changes to the investment regulations have had.

IBRC Liquidation

87. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department has engaged with the special liquidator of IBRC regarding the release of internal documents by a former official of the bank (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11060/18]

95. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the circumstances which allowed a person (details supplied) to furnish internal IBRC documents to a further person (details supplied) regarding the conduct of a person (details supplied) on matters pertaining to the IBRC's treatment of a debtor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11099/18]

107. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if he has engaged with the special liquidator of IBRC regarding the release of internal bank documents by a former bank official to a former debtor of the bank (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11031/18]

115. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the circumstances which led to a former official of a bank (details supplied) making allegations against another person and furnishing internal IBRC documents to a further person for use in a legal case being pursued; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11110/18]

210. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department has engaged with the special liquidator of IBRC regarding the release of internal IBRC documents by a former IBRC official (details supplied) to a former debtor of the bank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14247/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 87, 95, 107, 115, 178 and 210 together.

I am advised by the Special Liquidators of IBRC that, having obtained information that a former employee of IBRC may have had documentation in his possession which belonged to IBRC, their legal advisors engaged in correspondence with the former employee to get details of what documentation was in his possession and the circumstances surrounding same. They sought and obtained an undertaking that such documentation has now been returned and that the former employee has no further documentation in his possession relating to IBRC.

The Special Liquidators further advised that they are not in a position to comment on the circumstances which led the former employee to provide an affidavit in the legal case. The Special Liquidators have however sought a further undertaking from the former employee that he will not provide any confidential information to any third party without seeking the consent of the Special Liquidators in advance. The Special Liquidators have confirmed that they are

considering the matter further with their legal advisors.

Motor Insurance Costs

88. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to assist persons faced with increases in the cost of motor insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11008/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy should note that in my role as Minister for Finance I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I nor the Central Bank can interfere in the pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on the risks they are willing to accept.

However, it is acknowledged that pricing in the motor insurance sector has been subject to a lot of volatility in recent years, from a point where some premiums appeared to be priced at an unsustainably low level to the more recent experience of large increases.

Indeed, the problem of rising motor insurance premiums was the main impetus for the establishment of the Cost of Insurance Working Group. Its Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance was published in January 2017. The Report makes 33 recommendations with 71 associated actions to be carried out in agreed timeframes, set out within an Action Plan.

Work is ongoing on the implementation of the recommendations by the relevant Government Departments and Agencies and there is a commitment within the Report that the Working Group will prepare quarterly updates on its progress. The fourth such update was published on 20 February and shows that of the 46 separate deadlines set during 2017 within the Action Plan, 39 have been met. Substantial work has also been undertaken in respect of the nine action points categorised as “ongoing”.

It should be noted that the most recent CSO data (for February 2018) indicates that private motor insurance premiums have decreased by 18.1% since peaking in July 2016. While the CSO statistics indicate a greater degree of stability on an overall basis, these figures represent a broad average and therefore I appreciate many people may still be seeing increases. However, I am hopeful that the improved stability in pricing will be maintained and that premiums should continue to fall from the very high levels of mid-2016.

Finally, I would recommend drivers who are quoted increased premiums to consult the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission website, which has an informative section regarding the purchase of car insurance generally. One of the key tips listed to help cut costs is to “shop around” and “always get quotes from several insurance providers when you need to get or renew insurance”.

Brexit Issues

89. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department is planning the way in which a soft border would work on the Border if the EU requires same when the UK exits the customs union. [4562/18]

187. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department is planning the way in which a soft border would work if the EU requires same when the UK exits the customs union. [4559/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 89 and 187 together.

In the context of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union, the EU has made clear that in light of the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland, flexible and imaginative solutions will be required, including with the aim of avoiding a hard border, while simultaneously respecting the integrity of the Union legal order. This approach is reflected in the draft Withdrawal Agreement and its Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The Government has been clear that our preference is to avoid a hard border through the wider EU-UK future relationship agreement, or through specific solutions and we are also committed to exploring specific solutions to be proposed by the UK, if necessary. At the same time, and should it prove necessary, there is now the necessary legal provision to implement the backstop of maintaining full alignment in Northern Ireland with those rules of the Single Market and Customs Union necessary to protect North South cooperation and to avoid a hard border.

On 19 March 2019 the UK agreed that a backstop solution for the border will form part of the legal text of the Withdrawal Agreement. The UK has also agreed that all the issues identified in the EU text will be addressed to deliver a legally sound solution for the border.

Prime Minister May confirmed these agreements in her letter to President Tusk, in addition to reiterating the UK's commitment to agreements reached last December on protecting the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts and the gains of the peace process, including the overarching guarantee on avoiding a hard border.

Like all Government agencies, the Revenue Commissioners are actively engaged in examining a range of scenarios in order to support Ireland's objectives. However, the precise customs arrangements that will apply after Brexit will depend on the outcome of negotiations between the EU and UK.

Corporation Tax

90. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when he expects the escrow account to be set up with regard to a matter (details supplied); when he expects the company concerned to start paying into the escrow account; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13647/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): While the Government has never accepted the Commission's analysis in the Apple State aid decision, we have always been clear that we are fully committed to ensuring that recovery of the alleged State aid takes place without delay and has committed significant resources to ensuring that this is achieved as quickly as possible.

Significant progress has been made on this complex issue and the establishment of an escrow fund in compliance with all Irish and Constitutional law is closer to completion. Following a competitive tender process, the Bank of New York Mellon, London Branch has been selected as Preferred Tenderer for the provision of escrow agency and custodian services. In addition, the Department of Finance announced on 23rd March that following a competitive tender process, Amundi, BlackRock Investment Management (UK) Limited and Goldman Sachs Asset Management International have been selected as preferred tenderers for the provision of investment management services.

Over the coming weeks, the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA), which is

conducting the procurement process on behalf of the Minister for Finance, and Apple will be working with the preferred tenderers to finalise contracts.

Officials and experts from across the State have been engaged in intensive work to ensure that Ireland complies with all its recovery obligations as soon as possible. It is expected that payment into the escrow account will commence from Q2 2018.

Banking Sector Regulation

91. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the contacts he has had with the European Central Bank in relation to the regulation of the banks' number of distressed mortgages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13663/18]

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). The reduction of NPL's is also being given high priority at EU level with the Commission announcing their "Action Plan to Tackle Non-Performing Loans in Europe" in July 2017. The action plan calls upon various institutions including the Commission to take appropriate measures to further address the challenges of high NPL ratios in Europe.

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 sector remains well above the European average of c.5% (of gross loans). Hence in recent years the SSM has tasked the management and board of each institution with developing and implementing a strategy to address this challenge.

Progress to date in reducing NPL's has been primarily achieved by customers engaging directly with their banks and agreeing a sustainable restructure which provides the customer with an achievable path out of arrears. However in recent times, loan sales as a last resort have also been a feature of the deleveraging process. This would be in cases where meaningful engagement has not been forthcoming or affordability is not evident and in recognition of the fact that the end of the road has been reached and achieving an acceptable NPL ratio will not be possible without loan sales.

I have indicated recently that officials in my Department met with staff of the SSM at the highest level on two occasions in the past year and they outlined the background and history to the restructuring effort in Ireland and the progress the Irish banks have made in dealing with NPLs. Officials have also been involved in the various European committees and working groups that have been looking at this issue in recent times. Finally there was also regular and extensive contact between my officials and the ECB over the years of the external assistance programme.

Mortgage Arrears Proposals

92. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance his views on mortgage write-downs for mortgage holders in view of the willingness of a bank (details supplied) to offer a discount on loans it transfers to vulture funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13664/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware Non-perform-

ing 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). The reduction of NPL's is also being given high priority at EU level with the Commission announcing their "Action Plan to Tackle Non-Performing Loans in Europe" in July 2017. The action plan calls upon various institutions including the Commission to take appropriate measures to further address the challenges of high NPL ratios in Europe.

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Progress to date in reducing NPL's has been primarily achieved by customers engaging directly with their banks and agreeing a sustainable restructure which provides the customer with an achievable path out of arrears. As part of the CCMA's Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process (MARP) each bank has developed a suite of forbearance treatments and resolution strategies. Such treatment strategies include arrears capitalisation, reduced payments, split mortgages and voluntary sale for loss which may involve an element of debt write off.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to restructuring mortgages and clearly each borrower's solution is tailored to their own personal circumstances and is anchored in an assessment as to their level of affordability. It is also not for me as Minister to determine how bank's should design and implement their impairment and write-off policies. But in each case the core objectives remains the same that is to ensure that arrears solutions are sustainable in the long term and that they comply with the spirit and the letter of all regulatory requirements.

However in recent times, loan sales as a last resort have also been a feature of the deleveraging process. This would be in cases where meaningful engagement has not been forthcoming or affordability is not evident and in recognition of the fact that the end of the road has been reached and achieving an acceptable NPL ratio will not be possible without loan sales.

Banking Sector

93. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to address the diminution of banking services in rural Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11007/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I should stress at the outset that the Government has no formal role in the commercial decisions of the banks as to their future business model and whether or not they will close particular branches.

The Deputy will no doubt appreciate that the provision of services by banks, including the location of branches, is a commercial decision for the Boards and management of the institutions.

That said, I expect that any bank closing branches will do everything that it can to mitigate the impacts of the branch closures on local communities, including technology and the use of alternative means of service delivery. I also expect that the bank will ensure that customers are kept informed about developments and provided with the appropriate assistance to move branches, switch to other banks and avail of alternative means of accessing financial services. The Central Bank will also have a role in ensuring that consumer protection rules are followed.

The Deputy may be aware that An Post are providing a new current account service, the An Post Smart Account to the public. This offers a number of features to its account holders. Consumers can apply for an account online or in any Smart Account Post Office.

The Deputy will be aware of the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) whose mission is to deliver to Irish SMEs effective financial supports that address failures in the Irish credit market, while driving competition and innovation and ensuring the efficient use of available EU resources.

The SBCI does not engage in direct lending. It utilises an on-lending model, making finance available through partner finance providers known as on-lenders.

The SBCI began lending in March 2015. To the end of December 2017, SBCI supported funding of €925m has been provided to 22,928 SMEs supporting 119,533 jobs. Of specific relevance to this question is that over 85% of SBCI supported lending has gone to SMEs based outside Dublin.

Tax Code

94. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the concerns of the Central Bank that cash buyers such as international funds are putting home ownership beyond the reach of families; and his plans from a tax point of view to level the playing field. [13654/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In the 2016 Finance Act, my predecessor introduced provisions to address concerns raised in both the media and the Dáil regarding the use of section 110 companies and certain Irish collective investment vehicles by international investors to minimise their tax payments on Irish property transactions.

Section 22, Finance Act 2016 made certain changes to the taxation of qualifying companies, within the meaning of section 110 Taxes Consolidation Act 1997. The changes related to the taxation of profits which were derived from Irish land and buildings. Those changes took effect from 6 September 2016.

The 2016 Finance Act provided for the introduction of the Irish Real Estate Fund or IREF. The legislation was introduced to address concerns raised regarding the use of collective investment vehicles by non-resident investors to invest in Irish property. IREFs must deduct a 20% withholding tax on certain property distributions to non-resident investors.

A Real Estate Investment Trust or REIT is a quoted company, used as a collective investment vehicle to hold rental property. A REIT is exempt from corporation tax on qualifying income and gains from rental property, subject to a high profit distribution requirement to. A REIT provides the same after-tax returns to investors as direct investment in rental property, by eliminating the double layer of taxation at corporate and shareholder level which would otherwise apply.

I believe that the taxation regimes remain appropriate for these entities. The REIT regime is designed to prevent a double layer of taxation and the IREF regime is designed to protect the State's taxing rights over property, neither of these are favourable tax regimes.

My Department continues to monitor developments in the housing market, including residential property prices, on an ongoing basis. The current inflationary pressure in the residential market reflects an insufficient supply response to meet the current demographic demand for

housing. To address this imbalance the outstanding bottlenecks in the housing market need to be tackled.

Question No. 95 answered with Question No. 87.

Banking Sector

96. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the discussions he has had with financial institutions off-loading their description of distressed mortgage loans; his views on the decision by a bank (details supplied) to not appear before the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach on 27 February 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13672/18]

175. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the discussions he has had with financial institutions regarding-off loading their description of distressed mortgage loans; his views on the decision by a bank (details supplied) to not appear before the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach on 27 February 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13665/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 96 and 175 together.

As part of their regular engagement with the banks in which the State has a shareholding, officials in my Department discuss a wide range of topics, including loan sales. For example, in the case of Project Glas, the recently announced project announced by PTSB to sell a portfolio of NPLs, officials were first briefed by the bank on the timing of the sale, and potential composition of the portfolio, in the week commencing 15th January. Officials in turn, briefed me on the matter on 19th January.

In addition to the regular engagement Department officials have with the banks, I myself have met recently with senior officials of some of the Irish retail domestic banks and intend holding similar meetings with the remaining banks in due course. At these meetings, loan sales were discussed, where relevant. The Deputy will be aware in this regard, that it is not appropriate for me to put any more facts into the public domain, over and above what the banks themselves have disclosed, as I must respect commercial confidentiality and stock exchange disclosure rules.

For clarity, I should highlight for the Deputy that I cannot stop loan sales, even by the banks in which the State has a shareholding. These decisions are the responsibility of the Board and management of the banks which must be run on an independent and commercial basis. The banks' independence is protected by Relationship Frameworks, which are legally binding documents that I cannot change unilaterally. These frameworks were insisted upon by the European Commission to protect competition in the Irish market. Loan sales do not require my consent, though the banks are required to formally consult with me. In the case of the current PTSB loan sale process, the bank has not yet consulted with me but will do so in due course.

The Deputy has asked me to comment on my views on the decision by PTSB not to appear before the Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach on 27th February. In its response to the Committee, the bank highlighted that it would not be appropriate for its executives to attend a meeting on the original date proposed, as the bank was in a "closed period" ahead of the publication of its annual results on 14th March. However, the bank did state it was agreeable to meeting with the Committee on an alternative date and this meeting subsequently took place on 22nd March. Under the circumstances, my view is that the

bank's approach to the Committee's request for a meeting was not unreasonable.

Question No. 97 answered with Question No. 86.

Brexit Issues

98. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Finance the steps his Department and the Revenue Commissioners will seek to avoid disruption to Irish Sea movements under duty suspension between here and Great Britain post-Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11012/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Government's position remains clear - it wishes for the closest possible relationship between the EU and the UK, post Brexit. This is in line with the European Council Guidelines agreed on 23 March, which reaffirmed the EU's desire to establish a close partnership with the UK in the future. The Government and its EU partners agree that any future agreement must have the correct balance of rights and obligations, and that the integrity of the Single Market must be preserved. This is in Ireland's interests as membership of the Single Market is a core element of our economic strategy. Nevertheless, it is still our view that any EU-UK future relationship agreement should be comprehensive and ambitious and as wide as possible in its scope.

The text of the Withdrawal Agreement will include the legal terms for the transitional arrangements, which are hugely important for Ireland in giving certainty to individuals and businesses. We welcome that the EU has proposed that the whole of the EU acquis will apply during the transition, which means that the status quo will be preserved with the aim of avoiding any gaps or disruption between the UK leaving the EU and when a future relationship agreement enters into force, we further welcome the UK's agreement to an orderly transition and consider this as an important step for Irish business.

EU excise rules apply to the trade in alcohol, tobacco and mineral oil products. Such excisable goods move at present across the EU under a controlled messaging and confirmation system that is shared by all EU member states, known as the EU excise movement and control system. This system is in place to monitor and record the movement of excisable goods while duty is suspended, and to ensure that the correct amount of excise duty is paid when excise goods are released anywhere in the EU for consumption.

The future arrangements that will apply to cross border movements of excisable goods will depend on the outcome of discussion on the future relationship between the EU and the UK. In accordance with EU rules, it will technically be the case that if such an agreement does not provide for UK participation in the EU Excise Movement Control System, importers of excisable goods will still have the facility to import such goods from the UK with payment of excise duty suspended until the goods are released from the importer's excise warehouse.

Corporation Tax

99. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance if he has discussed the impact on Ireland and other EU member states of planned changes to taxation in the USA. [5421/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware, US tax reform legislation was agreed shortly before Christmas last year. This is the most substantial change

to the US tax code in 30 years. Companies and Governments around the world are now fully analysing what are very complex changes. Naturally, this is of great interest to Ireland given the large volume of US investment here. Consequently, my officials and our Embassy in the US, have been and continue to engage with business and others to fully understand the potential impacts of the changes in the US. We have also been engaging at EU level with other member states and the EU Commission on the implications for European trade with the US.

However, much of the detail of the proposed changes remains to be clarified in US IRS and Treasury Regulations yet to be published, and questions remain particularly regarding the compatibility of some aspects of the reforms with WTO rules and other international obligations.

I should mention that the US measures regarding deemed repatriation means that the United States is calling in its taxes. Companies will be required to pay hundreds of billions of dollars in tax liabilities, dating back to 1986. This is a vindication of what Ireland has been saying for many years. Though others have called on Ireland to claim these taxes, we have always been clear on what was Irish and what was not. Importantly, the deemed repatriation draws a line under the lingering controversy surrounding untaxed international profits.

While we remain alert and responsive to any changes in the US and international tax environment, it is clear that Ireland's access to the European market is, and will remain, a key factor in attracting FDI from the US and elsewhere. Global business, from the US or elsewhere, will always want to have operations in the EU, and Ireland will remain very competitive and attractive as an EU location to invest in and from which to do business.

Pension Levy

100. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department has undertaken a review of the quantum of the reduction in pension benefits payable to persons in the private and commercial sector as a result of the pension levy that was introduced in 2011 since that levy was introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13635/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I take it the Deputy is referring to the stamp duty levies applying to the assets of funded pension arrangements introduced in 2011 to pay for the Jobs Initiative, the chargeable persons for which are the trustees of pension schemes and others responsible for the management of pension fund assets.

Under the legislation, the payment of the levy is treated as a necessary expense of a pension scheme and the trustees or insurer, as appropriate, are entitled where needed to adjust current or prospective benefits payable under a scheme to take account of the levy. It is up to the trustees or insurer to decide whether, when and how the levy should be passed on and to what extent, given the particular circumstances of the pension schemes for which they are responsible. The legislation also includes safeguards aimed at ensuring that should the option of reducing scheme benefits be taken, it must be applied in an equitable fashion across the different classes of scheme members that could include active, deferred and retired members. In no case may the reduction in an individual member's or class of member's benefits exceed the member's or class of member's share of the levy. Where pension scheme trustees or an insurer took the decision to treat the levy as an expense of the pension scheme, they would have adjusted current or prospective benefits payable to members under that scheme. The consequence of this treatment by the trustees or insurer could be a permanent reduction in members' benefits.

A review of the quantum of the reduction in pension benefits payable to persons in the private and commercial sector as a result of the stamp duty levy on pension schemes has not been

undertaken by my Department.

Lobbying Data

101. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to a matter (details supplied); if he has been personally lobbied by Israeli Ministers on this issue; his plans to address this anti-democratic campaign by the Israeli Government and attempts to meddle in the affairs of Irish banks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13628/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In response to the Deputy's question, I have not been lobbied in this regard and I am unaware of any actual lobbying on this basis.

I am aware of and agree with the Tánaiste's reply to the same question on 20th March 2018 (PQ Ref No: 12429/18).

Tax Code

102. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance further to Parliamentary Question No. 90 of 30 January 2018, if he will consider adopting a system similar to the Australian model on inheritance tax whereby there is no capital acquisition tax and instead adopt a system in which capital gains tax applies in certain circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13642/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that section 573 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 provides that the transfer of assets on the death of a person is not regarded as a disposal for capital gains tax purposes. The assets of a deceased person are treated as having been acquired by the personal representatives or beneficiaries at their market value at the date of death. Consequently, a CGT charge does not arise on the death of a person and any increase in value in the transferred assets since their acquisition by the deceased person up to the date of death is ignored.

However, capital gains tax does operate in relation to increases in the value of inherited assets following a death. Personal representatives are chargeable to capital gains tax in respect of gains made on the sale of assets during the course of the administration of a deceased person's estate.

Persons who inherit assets are also chargeable to capital gains tax if they dispose of those assets where they have increased in value since the date of death.

I would also wish it to bring to the attention of the Deputy that one of the main of the reasons presented worldwide for inheritance tax is that it acts to address, to some extent, the concentration of wealth within families and to spread some of the benefit of inter-generational wealth transfers to society generally.

It follows that the basic principle on which CAT operates is that when a gift or inheritance takes place the wealth of the beneficiary grows, and this growth in wealth should be liable to taxation in the same way as income or gains through employment or investment.

The situation in this country is that inheritance tax and capital gains tax are entirely separate taxes and operate independently. Inheritance tax is charged on a person who inherits assets based on the value of those assets. Capital gains tax is charged on the person disposing of assets whose value has increased since being acquired. However, where both of these taxes are

chargeable on the same event, a credit is given against inheritance tax for capital gains tax paid.

I understand that in Australia capital gains tax following a death operates in the same way as it does in this country. It is charged on the increase in value of inherited assets between the date of death and the date of their disposal. This seems to be the standard capital gains tax treatment and is not imposed as an alternative to an inheritance. Australia, unlike this country, does not tax the value of inherited assets.

Clearly individual States can make changes to their tax legislation as they consider appropriate, but I have no plans to abolish inheritance tax.

Banking Sector

103. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Finance when the public banking investigation report will be published; the engagement his Department has in respect of this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13625/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Programme for a Partnership Government commits the Government to “thoroughly investigate the German Sparkassen model for the development of local public banks that operate within well-defined regions”. My Department along with the Department of Rural and Community Development are jointly tasked with the responsibility of fulfilling this commitment. Officials in both departments have been working closely together.

Local public banking is a system of state ownership of particular banks or other financial institutions. The local public banks in Germany are called “Sparkassen”. The operation of these Sparkassen is confined to particular geographic regions local in which they operate. Their aim is to promote economic development and financial inclusion in this area, not just profit maximisation. Working closely with local regional SMEs and building close relationships is an important part of their business model as well.

The investigation of local public banking included a number of aspects. There was engagement with stakeholders and interested parties through a public consultation process conducted last year. Additionally, there has been substantial analysis carried out of a proposal put forward by Irish Rural Link and the Savings Banks Foundation for International Cooperation (SBFIC), the international development wing of the Sparkassen group. This proposal set out a potential model of local public banking, based on the German Sparkassen model, in Ireland. There have been a number of meetings between officials and representatives from Irish Rural Link and SBFIC.

My colleague, the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Michael Ring T.D. and I anticipate that we will be in a position to jointly submit this report for Government approval in the near future. As well as this ongoing work, my Department is working with other Government departments to develop tailored and innovative policy initiatives and continue to support the needs of Irish SMEs and rural economic development, which I assure the Deputy remains a key Government priority.

Departmental Communications

104. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to ensure that alternative telephone numbers to 1850 and 1890 in all Departments of the Revenue Commis-

sioners are provided in order that those trying to discuss issues with officials are not charged beyond their normal telephone packages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13949/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that the 1890 LoCall service is the best available option for the scale of its telephone business, which averages almost 2.5 million callers each year. Revenue is however very conscious that some of its customers are not being allowed LoCall rates by their telephone service providers when using the service and has been actively seeking ways to reduce the cost burden.

This includes evaluating 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 through their existing ‘inclusive packages’ (bundle) to ‘phone’ Revenue from links within its website (www.revenue.ie) and mobile app (RevApp) without incurring the 1890 telephone costs. Revenue hopes to be in a position to launch some of these enhancements in 2018.

The Deputy may be aware that the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) held a public consultation in 2017 on the five classes of ‘Non-Geographic Number’ (NGN) services that are available. These include the ‘1800’ service” (Freephone), the ‘1850’ service (Shared Cost- Fixed Charge per Call), the ‘1890’ service (Shared Cost- Charge per Minute), the ‘0818’ service (Universal Access) and the ‘076’ service (Nomadic). As part of the consultation process, views were invited from interested parties and Revenue made a submission expressing its dissatisfaction at the rates charged for 1890 calls. Revenue also supported ComReg’s proposal that the retail charge applicable to a caller using any of the NGN services should not exceed the retail charge that would apply had the caller used a Geographic Number. Revenue is currently awaiting the outcome of the consultation process.

On a wider note, I am aware that Revenue has significantly enhanced its range of online services to reduce the need for customer telephone contact. This includes a new website (www.revenue.ie) which is specifically designed to help customers more easily find the information they are looking for. The information on the website is written in plain language and is easy to find. All of the feedback to date strongly confirms that the new service is very effective and has been well received by the vast majority of users.

Knowledge Development Box

105. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Finance if his attention has been drawn to the apparent contradiction in the approach to research collaborations between the IDA and the Revenue Commissioners (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [5958/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that this is not a matter of Revenue practice but occurs by design of the legislation.

Section 766(1)(b)(viii), introduced in Finance Act 2004, provides that a company may spend up to 5% of its total R&D spend on which the R&D tax credit is claimed, on outsourcing to a University or other 3rd level institution.

Further, section 766(1)(b)(viii), introduced in Finance Act 2007, which provided that a company may outsource up to 10% of its R&D to an unconnected company. The threshold was increased to 15% by Finance (No. 2) Act 2013. It is important to note that the maximum outsourcing is 10% / 15%, depending on the year, and that this amount is in addition to the 3rd level outsourcing.

Since Finance Act 2012 both the 3rd level outsourcing and the company outsourcing have been subject to an alternative test: the limit is the greater of €100,000 and the 5% / 10% / 15% as appropriate.

The OECD, in their formulation of the modified nexus, placed no limit on the amount of R&D that could be outsourced to unconnected 3rd parties. This was on the basis that R&D results in the development of IP which companies will not want to be known outside of their control group. The Knowledge Development Box therefore includes no limit on the amount of outsourcing to unrelated parties that will be included in the numerator of the modified nexus fraction.

Tax Compliance

106. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the Revenue Commissioners have audited only five section 110 companies for tax purposes; the action he has taken in ensuring they fulfil all their obligations in respect of Irish and European money laundering and terrorist financing; the mechanisms in place to review this and key persons in such organisations such as directors, senior managers and so on, on a yearly, monthly and quarterly basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13668/18]

182. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Finance the reason the Revenue Commissioners have audited only five section 110 companies for tax purposes; the action he has taken in ensuring they fulfil all their obligations in respect of Irish and European money laundering and terrorist financing; the mechanisms in place to review this and key persons in such organisations such as directors, senior managers and so on, on a yearly, monthly and quarterly basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13622/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 106 and 182 together.

I am advised by Revenue that a taxpayer, including a section 110 company, will be considered for a Revenue compliance intervention having regard to risk.

If an intervention is deemed appropriate it may be by way of audit or any other Revenue compliance intervention, based on an evaluation by Revenue of the presence of various risk factors that might indicate less than full compliance with tax legislation. Each Revenue compliance intervention is designed to be in the form which is most efficient in terms of both the time taken to carry it out and the resources needed to address the perceived tax risk. Depending on the progress or lack of progress of an initial compliance intervention and the nature and scale of non-compliance identified, the intervention can be escalated to an audit or investigation if this is necessary.

The number of non-audit compliance interventions (known as “aspect queries” which involves Revenue examining in detail particular aspects of a taxpayer’s activities) which Revenue carried out on section 110 companies was 348 in 2016 and 203 in 2017 (a total of 551 for the two years). As of 28 February 2018, 36 aspect queries in respect of section 110 companies have been finalised in 2018 to date. Moreover, there are 192 aspect queries currently underway in respect of section 110 companies.

Ireland’s money laundering compliance regime is governed by the Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) Act 2010.

In common with any other business or person operating within the State, Section 110 com-

panies which fall within the definitions of designated entities under the Act are subject to anti-money laundering (AML) and countering the financing of terrorism (CFT) regulatory measures contained in the Act, and fall under the supervision of the relevant competent authority to ensure that they are in compliance with these obligations.

In addition to these direct measures, many companies will have solicitors, auditors, bankers, paying agents and registrars, which are subject to AML/CFT requirements in respect of their own customers.

Ireland's AML regime has recently been peer reviewed by the FATF and this evaluation found that "*Ireland has a sound and substantially effective regime to tackle money laundering and terrorist financing*". The competent authorities under the Act follow a risk-based approach in the supervision of their respective sectors and have established good cooperation with financial institutions and designated non financial businesses and professions. Coordination, cooperation and the use of financial intelligence are strong points of the Irish AML/CFT framework.

Question No. 107 answered with Question No. 87.

Mortgage to Rent Scheme

108. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the regulations and policies in place to ensure the rental proceeds of buy to let mortgages which are in distress are paid over to the bank which holds the mortgage debt rather than be used for another purpose such as servicing the mortgage of the landlord's principal private residence; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13671/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have been advised by the Central Bank of Ireland that their Codes of Conduct do not include rules to ensure the rental proceeds of buy to let mortgages which are in distress are paid over to the bank which holds the mortgage debt rather than be used for another purpose such as servicing the mortgage of the landlord's principal private residence.

The Central Bank's Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears 2013 (the CCMA) applies to the mortgage loan of a borrower which is secured by his/her primary residence. Therefore the CCMA does not apply to Buy To Let mortgages.

However, the arrears handling provisions of the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Code apply to loans provided to consumers which are not covered by the CCMA, including Buy To Let mortgages of personal consumers. The relevant rules in the Consumer Protection Code cover the following matters:

- i. Having written procedures in place for the handling of arrears**
- ii. Provision of information to consumers in arrears**
- iii. That the regulated entity must, if requested, deal with a nominated third party of the personal consumer in relation to their arrears**
- iv. Revised repayment arrangements**
- v. Communication with consumers in arrears.**

Brexit Issues

109. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the impact he views Brexit will have on the banking and insurance sector; and if the German community bank, the

Sparkasse, will shortly be commencing operations here. [11011/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will understand, any negative impacts on the macro-economy of either or both the UK and Ireland would impact Irish banks and insurers.

From the date of the UK exit (or, if agreed, the end of a transition period) Irish banks and insurers which rely on a “passport” to provide services into the UK and vice-versa will lose the right to provide such services. As a result impacted firms in both Ireland and the UK are extensively engaged in contingency planning which may result in the relocation of business from the UK to the EU (including Ireland) and vice-versa. The Central Bank of Ireland and the Prudential Regulatory Authority (PRA) in the UK are in intensive dialogue with firms who are impacted and it is important to note that not all firms are impacted and/or impacted in the same way. The European regulatory system is formulating the supervisory guidance on the many issues raised by Brexit and the Central Bank of Ireland is heavily involved in the design of these policies through our participation in the SSM and the European Supervisory Authorities. While many firms are moving forward with Brexit preparation plans, the final impact of Brexit on banks and insurers will depend on the outcome of the EU27-UK negotiations, with the nature and duration of transition arrangements an important factor in determining the speed of adjustment.

My Department’s preparation and contingency work is ongoing and continues to examine all possible scenarios and challenges, and is a key input into the whole of Government approach. As part of its contingency planning, the Department is engaged on an ongoing basis in examining the potential impacts of Brexit on the financial services sector and potential mitigants. As part of this work the Department liaises with other Government Departments and Agencies who have responsibilities in this area, including Enterprise Ireland and the IDA. The Department also engages closely, via the Financial Stability Group with the Central Bank of Ireland, which has the statutory responsibility for financial stability. Brexit is a standing item on the Group’s agenda.

Additionally, the Government’s strategy to mitigate the impact of Brexit includes fully exploiting opportunities arising. With regard to the Financial Services sector, Brexit will provide opportunities for Ireland to increase its share of financial services based inward investment. In that regard, Minister of State Michael D’Arcy T.D. has responsibility for Financial Services, including the implementation of the IFS2020 Strategy for driving growth in the financial services sector.

As the Deputy is aware, my Department, along with the Department of Rural and Community Development are assigned the responsibility of fulfilling the Programme for a Partnership Government commitment to “thoroughly investigate the German Sparkassen model for the development of local public banks that operate within well-defined regions”. Officials in both departments have been working closely together and have finalised a report on their investigation on local public banking. My colleague, the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Michael Ring T.D. anticipate being able to jointly submit the report to Government, for approval, in the near future.

Tax Compliance

110. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the revenue compliance of dog breeding establishments; if he will authorise an audit by the Revenue Commissioners for licences of dog breeding premises; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[13641/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that it does not have any role to play in regard to the licensing of dog breeding premises.

As regards compliance with tax and duty obligations, Revenue has confirmed that dog breeding establishments are monitored in the same way as taxpayers across all other sectors. This includes selecting cases for audit or other interventions based on the presence of specific risk indicators and other available information.

Revenue's risk ranking systems are very comprehensive and take account of a wide range of data sources including details provided directly by taxpayers and information received from third party sources. Depending on the nature of the risks identified, Revenue may opt to carry out a sectoral based intervention project or individual case interventions. Revenue has confirmed that a number of such risk interventions were carried out on dog breeding premises in 2017.

In addition to tax compliance operations, Revenue works with various agencies such as the Dublin Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (DSPCA) to disrupt the cross border illegal trade in pups and has achieved some notable successes as part of this joint working initiative.

Financial Services Regulation

111. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Finance if officials in his Department have examined a report (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13659/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Central Bank of Ireland is responsible for the regulation of the financial services sector. In November 2016, Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) announced a complaints process for SME customers in Ulster Bank's GRG and indicated publically that "a customer is in-scope for the new complaints process if they were a small or medium sized enterprise under the control of GRG in the United Kingdom or Republic of Ireland between 1 January 2008 and 31 December 2013".

In line with its risk-based supervisory approach, the Central Bank has been and continues to monitor all relevant issues as they arise from a system perspective. The Central Bank will continue to monitor this matter and is overseeing complaints received for any issues arising particularly in the context of SME Regulations compliance. The protection of SME customers is a priority for the Central Bank. The Central Bank's SME Regulations provides key protections to SME customers including those on handling complaints and managing arrears and financial difficulties.

The Central Bank also continues to engage with the UK Financial Conduct Authority on this matter. I am confident that the Central Bank will act as appropriate on this matter and that it possesses the necessary tools to do so if required.

Credit Unions

112. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the recommendations of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach on the credit union sector, in particular with regard to tiered regulation and a review of levies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13661/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I welcome the Report of the Joint Committee which along with the Credit Union Advisory Committee (CUAC) Report and its forerunner the Commission on Credit Unions Report, makes an important contribution to the debate on credit union reform.

I wrote to the Joint Committee on 19th December 2017 to thank them for their Report and to advise that my views on the recommendations, many of which are common to the CUAC Report, including tiered regulation, and are being progressed.

Since 2012 there has been a very extensive engagement with the sector in relation to tiered regulation. The Commission on Credit Unions report in 2012 recommended the introduction of a tiered regulatory approach to ensure that ‘regulatory requirements in place for credit unions are proportionate to the nature and scale of the credit union.’ The Commission recommended a three tier system of regulation.

The CUAC report in 2016 recognised the significant challenges in the introduction of a tiered system and that the approach adopted can be expected to have a profound long-term effect on the sector and on balance considered a two tier system of regulation more appropriate.

Tiered regulation was also the subject of a Central Bank consultation, CP76, which finished in 2014. In light of the feedback received, the Central Bank did not propose to introduce a tiered regulatory framework for credit unions at that time.

The Implementation Group, established to monitor and oversee implementation of the CUAC Report recommendations, continues to consider tiered regulation. The Implementation Group is finalising a comprehensive paper which will put forward a number of proposals for consideration by the Central Bank. I expect that the Implementation Group will report to me shortly.

Finally, I can advise the Deputy that my Department will shortly issue an information note to explain all of the levies and charges the credit union sector pays. The Stabilisation Levy review which my Department undertook in 2017 has also been published on my Department’s website.

Motor Insurance Costs

113. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the implementation of recommendations of the Cost of Insurance Working Group examining motor insurance; the recommendations which have already been implemented; when the work is expected to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13636/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Cost of Insurance Working Group’s Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance was published in January 2017 and makes 33 recommendations with 71 associated actions to be carried out in agreed timeframes, which are set out in an Action Plan.

In line with the commitment to publish quarterly update reports on the implementation of the recommendations of the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance, the Working Group has published four update reports to date, most recently on 20 February last. This shows that of the 46 separate deadlines set during 2017 within the Action Plan, 39 have been met. Substantial work has also been undertaken in respect of the nine action points categorised as “ongoing”.

Some of the recommendations which have been fully implemented include the protocol

agreed with Insurance Ireland committing insurers to accept returning emigrants' claims-free driving experience in another country, the publication of the First Motor Insurance Key Information Report, and the setting up of a forum to better enable Insurance Ireland to become aware of issues affecting businesses and consumers.

All of the remaining actions are scheduled to be completed before the end of this year. At this juncture, as highlighted in the last update report, it is anticipated that the action points likely to be delayed beyond 2018 are those related to the large-scale initiatives under the remit of the Minister of Transport, Tourism and Sport. These includes the completion of the Master Licence Record project and the database to identify uninsured drivers.

However, the vast majority of the Action Plan should be completed by the end of this year, including in relation to key recommendations such as the establishment of a National Claims Information Database and relevant proposals received from the reports of the Personal Injuries Commission being put into operation.

It should be noted that the most recent CSO data (for February 2018) indicates that private motor insurance premiums have decreased by 18.1% since peaking in July 2016. While the CSO statistics indicate a greater degree of stability on an overall basis, these figures represent a broad average and therefore I appreciate many people may still be seeing increases. However, I am hopeful that the improved stability in pricing will be maintained and that premiums shall continue to fall from the very high levels of mid-2016.

Mortgage Book Sales

114. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the contacts he has had with senior management of the main banks in relation to the potential sale of loan books to vulture funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13662/18]

116. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance the meetings he has held with the State owned banks at which the issue of the sale of loans to vulture funds was raised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13938/18]

194. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance the reason he continues to allow banks, particularly those in which the Government has an ownership stake, to sell mortgage loans to vulture funds; his plans to implement policy changes to address this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13630/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 114, 116 and 194 together.

As part of their regular engagement with the banks in which the State has a shareholding, officials in my Department discuss a wide range of topics, including loan sales. For example, in the case of Project Glas, the recently announced project announced by PTSB to sell a portfolio of NPLs, officials were first briefed by the bank on the timing of the sale, and potential composition of the portfolio, in the week commencing 15th January. Officials in turn, briefed me on the matter on 19th January.

As this information was commercially sensitive, and as I am obliged to comply with stock exchange disclosure and market abuse rules, I was not in a position to discuss it publicly at the time.

In addition to the regular engagement Department officials have with the banks, I myself

have met recently with senior officials of some of the Irish retail domestic banks and intend holding similar meetings with the remaining banks in due course. At these meetings, loan sales were discussed, where relevant. The Deputy will be aware in this regard, that it is not appropriate for me to put any more facts into the public domain, over and above what the banks themselves have disclosed, as I must respect commercial confidentiality and stock exchange disclosure rules.

It is worth noting that, in the case of PTSB, no loan has been sold yet and it won't be known how many loans will be sold for a number of months, nor the composition of these loans. In addition, it is not known to whom the loans will be sold. However, I want and expect PTSB to be transparent with their customers when it comes to this sale process as it evolves.

It is important to highlight that there are no changes to the rights or obligations of a customer whose loan is sold by a bank. All terms and conditions attached to their mortgage contract remain in place. In addition, as credit servicing firms servicing loans on behalf of unregulated entities are required to comply with the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA), all protections under the CCMA are unchanged. The customer is in the exact same position as they were before their loan was sold. In relation specifically to restructured loans, including splits, any purchaser will be obliged to honour the terms of the restructure agreement, should such loans be included in the final sale.

Notwithstanding the protections currently in place, I have made it clear that I am prepared to engage with Deputies from other parties in an effort to see if we can strengthen and enhance the protections, in a sensible manner, that are already in place for mortgage holders. I would highlight in this regard the Bill that has been introduced by Deputy Michael McGrath which seeks to regulate credit agreement owners of mortgage loans and which has received Government support.

For clarity, I should highlight for the Deputy that I cannot stop loan sales, even by the banks in which the State has a shareholding. These decisions are the responsibility of the Board and management of the banks which must be run on an independent and commercial basis. The banks' independence is protected by Relationship Frameworks, which are legally binding documents that I cannot change unilaterally. These frameworks were insisted upon by the European Commission to protect competition in the Irish market. Loan sales do not require my consent, though the banks are required to formally consult with me. In the case of the PTSB loan sale, the bank has not yet consulted with me but will do so in due course.

Question No. 115 answered with Question No. 87.

Question No. 116 answered with Question No. 114.

Property Tax

117. Deputy Jonathan O'Brien asked the Minister for Finance when a decision on the future of the local property tax will be made. [13937/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I recently announced a review of the Local Property Tax (LPT) which will look in particular at the impact on LPT liabilities of property price developments. It will include an examination of the outstanding recommendations of the 2015 Thornhill review of the Local Property Tax. It is expected that the review will be completed at the end of August and that the review report will provide a number of policy choices for consideration. The review will be informed by the desirability of achieving relative stability, both over the short and longer terms, in LPT payments of liable persons. It will also include a

consultation process to enable all interested parties and individuals to submit their views on the future of the LPT.

My Department is advancing work on this matter in conjunction with the Departments of the Taoiseach, Housing, Planning & Local Government, Public Expenditure & Reform and the Revenue Commissioners. The purpose of the review will be to inform me in relation to any actions I may recommend to Government concerning the overall yield from LPT and its contribution to total tax revenue. This will enable me to revert to Government with proposals for change to the LPT in a timely way. Any such change would need to be legislated for by the first quarter of 2019 so that the Revenue Commissioners can be in a position to have the necessary administrative and technical arrangements in place in time in respect of the 2020 LPT year.

EU Budget Contribution

118. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the future level of Ireland's contribution to the EU budget and multi-annual financial framework; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [12894/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department currently forecasts that Ireland's contribution to the EU budget will be €2,650 million in 2018, €2,675 million in 2019 and €2,750 million in 2020. It is worth noting that these forecasts are contingent on a number of variables, including updated GNI forecasts, the size of the overall EU budget for the year and other EU budget operational developments which will only emerge as the year progresses. As a result, all forecasts will be monitored and updated on an ongoing basis as new information becomes available.

The current Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) (2014-2020) provides a medium-term framework for financial programming and budgetary discipline by ensuring that EU spending is predictable and stays within agreed limits. The annual EU budget negotiations take place within the framework of the medium-term ceilings as established under the MFF.

As the current MFF is coming to the end of its lifespan, the European Commission is due to publish its formal proposal on the next MFF in May 2018.

While my Department has undertaken some initial preparations on the future MFF, it would not be prudent to comment on any individual elements without seeing the broader package within which they fit. My Department will continue to work closely with other Government Departments and will examine the proposal in detail upon its publication.

European Central Bank

119. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on the engagements and discussions he has had with other EU leaders on vacancies at the European Central Bank. [9660/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have ongoing contact with my EU counterparts, including at the monthly Ecofin and Eurogroup meetings. In relation to vacancies at the European Central Bank, I was in direct contact with many of my counterparts in support of my nomination of the Governor of the Central Bank of Ireland, Professor Philip Lane, for the position of Vice President of the European Central Bank.

During these contacts, I received very positive feedback and expressions of support in rela-

tion to the candidacy from many Member States who acknowledged how well-qualified Professor Lane would be for the position. I believed, however, that it was crucial that the election of a new Vice-President be based on consensus. In this context, I decided that it would be in the best interests of the Euro-area as a whole to withdraw Professor Lane's candidacy in advance of any vote. I wish to reiterate my appreciation to Professor Lane for putting himself forward as a candidate, whose ability and expertise was widely acknowledged throughout the process.

Question No. 120 answered with Question No. 82.

Question No. 121 answered with Question No. 74.

NAMA Board

122. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the appointments to the Board of NAMA advertised in January 2018; if he has considered appointing persons with the requisite skill in construction and real estate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13940/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Under the NAMA Act 2009, the NAMA Board is to consist of nine members - the NAMA Chairman, the CEO of NAMA (ex-officio), the CEO of the NTMA (ex-officio), and six ordinary members. There are currently seven members on the NAMA Board and there are two vacancies for ordinary members which have arisen as a result of departures from the board in December 2013 and January 2014. A full complement of Directors and committee members will ensure appropriate corporate governance as the Agency progresses its objectives and plans for its final phase and wind-up.

As the Deputy will be aware, on 11 January 2018 the Department of Finance launched the process to appoint two new ordinary members to the Board of NAMA to fill the current vacancies. This process is being run in conjunction with the Public Appointments Service (PAS) and in line with the guidelines governing appointments for State Boards which can be found at: http://www.publicjobs.ie/publicjobs/publication/document/2014_1125_Guidelines_Appointments_to_State_Boards.pdf

The application process closed on 8 February 2018 and applications are currently being reviewed. Essential criteria for these roles include demonstrable business expertise in one or more of a number of relevant areas including commercial and residential property development. The full set of criteria for this vacancy is set out in the information booklet for this process, available at: <http://www.stateboards.ie/stateboards/campaignAdvert/68882/booklet.htm>. As this appointment process is ongoing it would not be appropriate for me to comment any further at this time.

Mortgage Book Sales

123. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to block sales by financial institutions in which the State has a majority share holding to unregulated vulture funds. [11006/18]

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). The reduction of NPL's is also being given high priority at EU level with the Commission announc-

ing their “Action Plan to Tackle Non-Performing Loans in Europe” in July 2017. The action plan calls upon various institutions including the Commission to take appropriate measures to further address the challenges of high NPL ratios in Europe.

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 sector remains well above the European average of c.5% (of gross loans). Hence in recent years the SSM has tasked the management and board of each institution with developing and implementing a strategy to address this challenge.

Progress to date in reducing NPL’s has been primarily achieved by customers engaging directly with their banks and agreeing a sustainable restructure which provides the customer with an achievable path out of arrears. However in recent times, loan sales as a last resort have also been a feature of the deleveraging process. This would be in cases where meaningful engagement has not been forthcoming or affordability is not evident and in recognition of the fact that the end of the road has been reached and achieving an acceptable NPL ratio will not be possible without loan sales.

Under the Relationship Frameworks (RFs) the disposal of loans is a commercial decision for the management and Board of each individual institution and is not subject to Ministerial consent. I therefore do not have the power to stop a loan sale. These agreements are legally binding documents that I cannot change unilaterally and they were insisted upon by the European Commission to protect competition in the Irish market. While loan sales do not require my consent, banks are required to formally consult with me during the process.

Finally, it is important to highlight that the contractual terms of borrowers remain in place post any loan sale. In addition, all the protection enjoyed by borrowers under the CCMA is unaffected. In relation to buy to let or BTL mortgages, it should be noted that the rights of tenants remain unchanged if they happen to live in a property connected to a loan sale.

Corporation Tax

124. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated impact of proposed EU tax changes on his Department’s estimates of Ireland’s corporation tax revenues in 2018, 2019 and 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13627/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am assuming that the Deputy is referring to the recently published proposals from the Commission on taxation of certain digital activities. I am advised that Revenue have been examining the potential impact of the proposed changes proposed by the Commission but which yet have to be discussed by Council. Information provided in Corporation Tax returns does not separate the digital and internet activities of companies from other activities within the same entity, which makes estimation of impacts challenging in the absence of such information. However, with the recent publication of more detailed proposals from the Commission, Revenue will continue this work towards estimating the possible impact of the proposals.

Insurance Data

125. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when he expects the national claims information database to be fully up and running; when he expects enacting legislation to be brought forward and passed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13643/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The development of the National Claims Information Database is a complex project as insurers very often record data in different ways and do not necessarily use the same definitions.

For this reason, my officials established a data sub-group in 2017, which has been meeting since then to examine the issues regarding its development and to prepare the General Scheme of the legislation required. At the end of 2017, it completed its work on the development of this Scheme and on 19 December 2017, the Government approved the General Scheme of the Central Bank (National Claims Information Database) Bill.

The Bill is included in the Government Legislative Programme on the list of Priority Legislation for publication this session. It was submitted to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform and the Taoiseach for pre-legislative scrutiny, and that Committee contacted me in February to indicate that it would not be conducting any further scrutiny on the Bill. It should also be noted that the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel assigned a drafter to the Bill on 26 January 2017 and officials in my Department are currently working with the drafter to finalise a draft of the Bill as soon as possible. A consultation will also have to take place with the European Central Bank on the Bill once it is published.

As the Deputy will be aware, it will take a certain amount of time following publication of the Bill, for it to pass through the Houses of the Oireachtas however I am hopeful that with the cooperation of all parties in the Houses, the Bill can be considered and approved expeditiously.

To ensure that the Database can be operationalised quickly following the enactment of the legislation, the Central Bank has continued to work in parallel on the technical specifications for the Database and recently held a series of meetings with the insurance sector as part of its consultations with the sector on developing these specifications.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

126. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his meeting with Mr. Donald Tusk on 8 March 2018. [13931/18]

The Taoiseach: I was very pleased to welcome the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, to Dublin on 8 March.

Our discussions, which took place ahead of the March European Council, covered the Brexit negotiations, EU trade policy, Economic and Monetary Union, and the taxation challenges posed in the digital era, as well as a number of foreign policy issues.

On Brexit, we discussed progress in relation to the draft Withdrawal Agreement, including on the Irish-specific issues. I stressed the importance of translating into the legal text the commitments and principles agreed in the Joint Report in December, including the backstop. President Tusk reiterated his strong solidarity with Ireland and said that our concerns were shared EU concerns. We also discussed the EU guidelines on the future relationship between the EU and the UK (then in draft form), which took into account the parameters outlined by Prime Minister May in her Mansion House speech.

I said that the draft guidelines reflected our ambition for a close partnership with the UK, while ensuring a level playing field and the integrity of the Single Market. I welcomed, in particular, the commitment to revisit our position should the UK approach evolve.

On digital taxation, I said that all companies, including digital platforms, should pay their

fair share of tax. We are committed to global tax reform but we need an approach which is evidence-based, sustainable in the long-term, and focussed on aligning taxing rights with the location of real substantive value-creating activity.

That is why we have been working through the OECD to achieve the widest possible international consensus. This is a complicated area and it is important that we get it right. In our view, short term and uncoordinated measures could lead to unintended consequences.

On the future of the Economic and Monetary Union, President Tusk noted the Joint Paper which had been published by the Nordic, Baltic, Dutch and Irish Finance Ministers earlier this month, and looked forward to further discussions at the Euro Summit on 23 March.

We exchanged views on EU trade policy and agreed that Europe and the US should make every effort to work together.

We also discussed EU relations with Turkey and agreed the importance of continued engagement, notwithstanding our concerns in relation to human rights.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

127. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his meeting with the Governor of Texas, the issues that were discussed, and if they included the Mexican border. [13557/18]

128. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his meeting with the Governor of Oklahoma; and the issues that were discussed. [13558/18]

129. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the meetings he held while in Washington DC; and the issues that were discussed. [13559/18]

130. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he discussed Russia with President Trump. [13560/18]

131. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the response he received from President Trump when he discussed Brexit at their meeting. [13561/18]

132. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the breakfast meeting he attended in New York with the Mayor during the St. Patrick's day festivities; and the issues that were discussed. [13761/18]

133. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the companies he met while in the USA for St. Patrick's week; and the issues that were discussed. [13762/18]

134. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the new proposal to address the issue of the undocumented Irish that was discussed during his visit to the USA recently. [13764/18]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 127 to 134, inclusive, together.

I visited the United States from 11-17 March for this year's St Patrick's Day programme. My visit included engagements in Austin Texas, Durant Oklahoma, Washington D.C. and New York.

In Austin, I paid a courtesy call on Governor Abbott. Our conversation focused on the bilateral economic relations between Ireland and Texas. We did not discuss the Mexican border. I

spoke at the South by South West Festival, where I also visited the stands of a number of Irish-owned companies exhibiting at the Festival including; Tweak, Warduck, Food Marble, Mashable, Learnupon, Edgescan, Usheru, Digisoft, Video Elephant, and GirlCrew.

In Durant, Oklahoma, where I visited the Choctaw Nation of Native Americans, I also had a courtesy call with Governor Mary Fallin during which we discussed deepening bilateral relations between Ireland and Oklahoma, especially economically.

In Washington D.C. I held political meetings with President Trump, Vice President Pence, as well as with senior members of Congress including Speaker Ryan, House Majority Leader McConnell, Senators Schumer and Leahy, Congressmen Neal and King, and the Friends of Ireland Caucus. My priority in these discussions was to further develop the US - Ireland bilateral relationship, and to advance Ireland's interests, including in relation to trade, and the status of undocumented Irish citizens in the US.

As has been reported, President Trump indicated that he was favourably disposed towards the possibility of a bilateral agreement on immigration issues, based on a reciprocal arrangement for US and Irish citizens that could help resolve the difficult situation faced by undocumented Irish citizens in the US. However, it is important to recall that finding a solution remains a complicated question that requires support both from the Executive and from Congress. We will continue to work at all levels to secure a positive outcome.

In relation to our discussion on Brexit, this was an opportunity for me to brief the President on the state of play with negotiations, and Ireland's priorities and objectives. The President thanked me for the update and indicated his hope for a successful outcome to the negotiations process. I did not discuss Russia in detail with President Trump.

Also in Washington D.C. I attended a roundtable discussion at the US Chamber, which included representatives of Johnson and Johnson Vision, Google, Allergan, Amazon, Bank of America, Boeing, Dow Chemical, FedEx, Intel, MetLife, S&P Global and Zimmer Biomet. We discussed Ireland's economic progress, Brexit negotiations, International Trade & Taxation.

I also attended a roundtable discussion with representatives of Irish-owned companies with operations in the US, including; Kerry, Intuition, Icon PLC, Kingspan, Globoforce, CRH/Oldcastle, Ocean Energy and Wisetek. We discussed the achievements of Irish owned companies in the US, their contribution to the two-way trading relationship between Ireland and the US, as well as the role of Enterprise Ireland and other State Agencies in supporting their continued expansion and growth in the US.

I attended a series of events hosted by our enterprise agencies, including the Science Foundation Ireland St. Patrick's Day medal presentation, and a joint Irish agency lunch event with 350 business and economic contacts at which I launched the Global Ireland communications campaign.

I also spoke at a number of events, including at the Brookings Institution, at an event hosted by Ireland Funds, at a Reception hosted by Ireland's Ambassador to the US, and at an event marking the 20th Anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement.

In New York, I met Mayor Bill de Blasio on a number of occasions including at an event at the site of the new Irish Arts Center, and at the Mayor's Breakfast in Gracie Mansion which was a ceremonial occasion. My discussions with the Mayor were focused on the St. Patrick's Day celebrations and the Ireland-New York relationship.

Also in New York, I attended a lunch with business leaders, hosted by Michael Bloomberg. Companies represented included JP Morgan Chase, Barclays, Bank of America and Citigroup

amongst others. The event was a further opportunity to highlight Ireland's economic progress and our advantages as location for inward investment, including of course in the context of Brexit.

Government Information Service

135. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he is planning to replace www.merrionstreet.ie as a website and a social media identification (details supplied). [13841/18]

136. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he and his officials in the strategic communications unit have plans on the way to deal with fake social media accounts (details supplied). [13842/18]

140. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the number of meetings the strategic communications unit has had with the managers and editorial staff of national newspapers to discuss content partnership arrangements; when they commenced; and the location in which they were held. [14144/18]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 135, 136 and 140 together.

There are no plans to replace merrionstreet.ie as a website or as a social media identity. Twitter has procedures in place for reporting fake social media accounts. Staff in Merrionstreet have been in contact with Twitter regarding this. As a result, Merrionstreet is now part of Twitter's Partnership Support Portal. This means that future reports regarding fake websites impersonating as merrionstreet.ie will automatically be escalated and dealt with immediately.

Staff in the SCU met the following national newspaper editors in the context of developing content partnerships for Project Ireland 2040:

The Managing Director, Irish Times and the team managing content partnerships;

Managing Editor INM and INM Editorial Board, covering the following titles, Irish Independent, Evening Herald, Star, Sunday Independent, Sunday World;

Managing Editor and CEO of The Journal:

RTE News and Editorials Teams.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

137. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Taoiseach if he raised the issue of the appointment of a US ambassador here when he met recently with US President Trump. [13856/18]

The Taoiseach: The President has already indicated his desire to see an Ambassador appointed at the earliest opportunity and the Irish Government understands that the US Administration is treating this matter as a priority. I did not have detailed discussions on the matter with the President on this occasion.

Taoiseach's Communications

138. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Taoiseach if he has used a personal email address

for Government business since his appointment, including in an email to a person (details supplied) on 9 July 2017 at 15:38. [13959/18]

139. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Taoiseach if his senior staff have used personal email addressees for official Government business since his appointment; and the policy in place regarding the use of private non-official email addressees. [13960/18]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 138 and 139 together.

I and the staff working in my Private Office have been assigned official email accounts. These accounts are only accessible through my Department's secure network and, in some circumstances, remotely using officially supplied and appropriately secured mobile devices such as laptop computers or mobile telephones.

My Department's ICT Policy stipulates that where personal email accounts are used for business purposes, due regard must be taken of the sensitivity and confidentiality of the information being transmitted. The Policy further requires that, where personal email accounts are used for business purposes, a copy of any record created must be retained in an appropriate official electronic filing system and/or hard copy file which can be accessed should the record be the subject of a Freedom of Information request.

I and the staff working in my Private Office use our Departmental email accounts for official business. From time to time, a third party may email me or my staff about official business using a personal email address (such as occurred in the instance referenced by the Deputy). In line with my Department's ICT policy, if such correspondence is received, I or my staff copy the reply to Government officials thereby creating a record of the correspondence which can be accessed should it be subject to a Freedom of Information request. Indeed, the correspondence referred to by the Deputy was released in response to a Freedom of Information request.

Question No. 140 answered with Question No. 135.

Taoiseach's Meetings and Engagements

141. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach if he discussed regulatory matters when he met the CEOs of companies (details supplied) when he was in the United States of America recently. [14145/18]

The Taoiseach: During a visit which I undertook to the United States in early November 2017, I met Mr. Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook. I did not have any substantive discussion on regulatory matters with Mr. Zuckerberg. I did not meet with the CEO, or any company representatives, of Twitter, during my visit.

Seanad Reform

142. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the process that has been agreed to appoint a chair to the Seanad Éireann reform group. [14147/18]

The Taoiseach: The question of who might Chair the Implementation Group on Seanad Reform is still under consideration.

Cabinet Committee Meetings

143. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the Cabinet committee at which justice issues are discussed; and when it last met. [14148/18]

The Taoiseach: Cabinet Committee G deals with justice issues. It last met on 18 January 2018 and its next meeting is scheduled to take place on 16 April 2018.

Central Statistics Office

144. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Taoiseach the frequency with which officials from his Department meet with the CSO. [14149/18]

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Joe McHugh): The CSO is an independent Office under the Statistics Act 1993. Officials from the Department of the Taoiseach meet with CSO representatives as required to support the Taoiseach and Minister of State in performing their statutory functions with regard to the CSO. They also meet through participation in many different fora including the National Statistics Board (NSB) (which has an Assistant Secretary from the Department of the Taoiseach as a member), consultative groups set up by the CSO or other bodies, various civil service and public service networks and boards and at statistical briefings provided by the CSO at the time of the publication of certain key releases.

Defence Forces Remuneration

145. **Deputy Noel Greally** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of cases from his Department before the conciliation and arbitration scheme; the number of years these cases have been before the scheme for hearing, by number and by year; the reason these cases have not been heard; the timeframe for these cases to be heard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13881/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The Defence (Amendment) Act 1990 and Defence Force Regulations S6 provided for the establishment of representative associations for members of the Permanent Defence Force. The associations that have since been established are RACO (for commissioned officers) and PDFORRA (for enlisted personnel).

The scheme of Conciliation and Arbitration (C&A) for members of the Permanent Defence Force provides a formal mechanism for the determination of claims and proposals from the Permanent Defence Force Representative Associations relating to remuneration and conditions of service.

Having regard to commitments made under pay agreements, members of the Permanent Defence Force can make representations in relation to their pay and conditions of service through their representative bodies, PDFORRA and RACO. Where agreement is not reached it is open to both official and representative sides to refer the matter to an adjudicator or an arbitration Board to settle the matter.

Six meetings of Conciliation Council are held with each Representative Association each year, normally held at intervals no greater than once every two months. There are also a number of sub-committees, established to discuss and progress certain matters such as pay and allowances, induction, etc.

Officials from my Department continue to work with the Representative Associations in a

positive and collaborative process within the CandA Scheme to resolve issues. There is also ongoing engagement on a regular basis between the Official side and the Representative side on a range of items which are processed through CandA.

Matters dealt with under the C&A Scheme are confidential in nature and therefore it would not be appropriate for me to comment further.

Military Medals

146. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if he will amend existing protocols in order that medals of the Defence Forces awarded for service during the period 1916 to 1921 can be worn by family members in cases in which the recipient is deceased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13610/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The existing protocol recognises that medals are decorations awarded to individuals in recognition of specific acts and service and as such the approach is that they should only be worn by the individuals to whom they were awarded. While I understand the family pride and history attached to medals relating to the period in question, the current guidance, which is not statutory in nature, appears appropriate in the circumstances.

Defence Forces Remuneration

147. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if his Department has made a submission to the Public Service Pay Commission on behalf of the Defence Forces; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13879/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): In 2017, under my direction, the Department of Defence raised recruitment and retention issues as part of its original submission to the Public Service Pay Commission. In a further acknowledgement of these issues the Government tasked the Public Service Pay Commission with examining these challenges in the Defence Sector in more detail.

The Public Service Pay Commission has commenced this work and has requested detailed information from the Department of Defence. Defence management are preparing their submission which will be sent to the Commission in the coming weeks.

The Public Service Pay Commission is due to complete this exercise in the second half of 2018. The findings and proposals arising will be considered at that time.

Departmental Budgets

148. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the amount that was spent of the overall budget allocated to his Department in each of the years 2014 to 2017 for all aspects of the budget; the amount that was returned to the Exchequer; the amount that was carried forward to future years by year and category of expenditure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13880/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe): The budget allocated to my Department makes provision for Vote 35 Army Pensions and Vote 36 Defence.

The gross budget provision and actual expenditure for the years 2014 to 2017 are shown in the following table.

Year	Gross Budget Provision	Actual Expenditure Outturn	Amount Unspent at Year End
2014	€898.8m	€898.6m	€0.2m
2015	€898.3m	€898.0m	€0.3m
2016	€905.5m	€905.4m	€0.1m
2017	€921.4m	€920.5m*	€0.9m*

*provisional outturn

Supplementary estimates were required for the Army Pensions Vote to meet the cost of pensions for former members of the Defence Forces, amounting to €4.8m in 2014; €6.5m in 2015; €11m in 2016 and €10.7m in 2017 and these amounts were offset by comparable savings on the Defence Vote.

Surplus Appropriations-in-Aid were received, amounting to €8.7m in 2014; €6.9m in 2015; €15.7m in 2016 and €10.1m in 2017 and these were returned to the Exchequer, as required under Public Financial Procedures.

There was no amount carried forward in respect of the years 2014 to 2017.

Brexit Negotiations

149. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has spoken to his EU counterparts regarding the terms of transition recently finalised in Brussels on 19 March 2018. [13844/18]

151. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has spoken to Mr. Michel Barnier since 19 March 2018. [14158/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 149 and 151 together.

Maintaining frequent contact with EU partners, including the EU Chief Negotiator, Michel Barnier, has been a priority for Ireland throughout the Article 50 negotiations process.

I have met with Mr Barnier on a number of occasions since taking office, most recently in Brussels on 19 March. Mr Barnier updated me on the progress made with the UK in advancing discussions on the draft Withdrawal Agreement, including an in-depth exchange on the draft Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Mr Barnier also provided an update to the EU27 Member States at the General Affairs Council (Art. 50) on 20 March regarding the progress made with the UK in advancing discussions on the draft Withdrawal Agreement, including in relation to transition. Ireland was represented at this meeting by Minister for European Affairs, Helen McEntee T.D.

I welcome that the terms reflected in the draft Withdrawal Agreement are fully consistent with the EU's objective of agreeing a transition period based on the status quo. This is an approach that I have strongly advocated for in my bilateral contacts with EU partners. A transition period based on the status quo will provide certainty and limit disruption for our citizens and businesses. Under such an arrangement the UK will be expected to continue to apply the full

EU acquis.

As concerns the duration of such a transition, the Government agrees that in the interests of long term certainty, and to accelerate agreement on the future relationship agreement, it must be time bound. This is the overall view of both the EU and of the UK. Therefore a date of 31 December 2020 has been set for the end of the transition period and this has been reflected in the text of the draft Withdrawal Agreement. This also takes account of the EU's budgetary processes and the fact that the current Multiannual Financial Framework will conclude at the end of 2020. But equally, as the negotiations progress, the overriding objective on both sides must be to avoid any gaps and any cliff edge effects. It is therefore welcome that the General Affairs Council has agreed to keep this under constant review, taking account of developments in the Brexit negotiations. This provides the flexibility required.

Good Friday Agreement

150. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the commemorations for the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement in Dublin, Belfast, London and the United States of America. [14146/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): A programme of events is underway, at home and abroad, to highlight this important anniversary and to mark the achievement of the Agreement, which continues to be the cornerstone of our commitment to peace and reconciliation.

My Department continues to engage with other Government Departments and, both here on the island of Ireland and through our overseas Embassy network, with a range of individuals, groups and institutions, who are considering and planning conferences, seminars, cultural responses, acts of commemoration and other initiatives to mark the 20th anniversary.

The Government's programme will include a production called *A Further Shore*, which uses poetry, images and music to reflect on the troubled journey towards peace and reconciliation on the island of Ireland. This production will take place in London on 5th April and Belfast on 9th April. Events to mark the people's vote for the Agreement on the 22nd May are also under development. An all-island schools competition is also underway, in co-operation with the Department of Education, and a prizegiving ceremony will take place for the winners of this competition in Dublin in May.

In February, I spoke at a Co-operation Ireland '20 Years of Peace' conference in New York on the Good Friday Agreement, which was supported by the Consulate there. Earlier this month the Taoiseach addressed a forum on the anniversary at the Library of Congress in Washington DC.

Further events, organised or supported through our Mission network, are currently planned for Abuja, Boston, New York, San Francisco, Toronto, Brussels, Kosovo, Warsaw, Beijing, Tokyo, Geneva and Tel Aviv.

The events marking this important anniversary will provide an opportunity to reflect on the peace process, past and present; to remember the loss of life during the years of conflict; and to look back at all that has happened on the journey of peace and reconciliation on the island of Ireland.

This journey is of course an ongoing one, and the continued imperative to work to realise the full potential of the Good Friday Agreement will form an essential part of the Government's

approach to the 20th anniversary.

Question No. 151 answered with Question No. 149.

Ministerial Travel

152. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the reason India was not included in the ministerial programme of St. Patrick's Day visits in 2017 or 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13555/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Saint Patrick's Day presents a unique platform for promoting Ireland's political and economic interests around the world. Recommendations for Ministerial travel over the Saint Patrick's Day period are based on input from our Team Ireland network of diplomatic missions and state agency offices overseas and wide consultation and advice from across Departments and Agencies at home on where Ministerial visits would have most significant added value in promoting Ireland's interests internationally.

One of the factors taken into consideration in making decisions on priority locations for Ministerial travel is whether there are any significant Ministerial visits planned in the period immediately before or after Saint Patrick's Day which could lessen the impact of an a Ministerial visit during the Saint Patrick's Day period itself. In the case of India significant Education promotion trade missions were planned and took place in the run up to Saint Patrick's Day in 2017 and again this year.

In 2017, the Minister of State for Training, Skills and Innovation, John Halligan T.D. led 16 companies on a major education promotion mission to India from 18-26 February. On 22-27 February 2018, the Minister for State for Education, Mary Mitchell O'Connor led the largest education mission to India to date involving 20 Irish Higher Education institutions. Given the scheduling of these two major Ministerial trade missions in the immediate run up to the Saint Patrick's Day period it was felt that our trade priorities in the region were already being addressed. Given the resources associated with a St Patrick's Day visit, it was felt that these would be best focussed elsewhere.

Passport Applications Administration

153. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his Department will make special arrangements to provide additional staff, working hours and supports to the Passport Office to address the large backlog in passport applications; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13565/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Passport Service is currently processing over 70,000 passport applications. These applications are going through the normal checking, processing and security stages.

The target turnaround time for applications made via the online passport application service is 10 working days plus postage. The majority of online applications are currently being processed within 5 working days, well ahead of this target. The award winning online service currently accommodates adult renewals and passport card applications and it is planned to further extend this service to other categories of renewals by the end of 2018. I would urge applicants wishing to renew their passports, whether residing in Ireland or overseas, to avail of the online

passport application service where possible.

The average turnaround time for renewal applications submitted through Passport Express is currently 14 working days, one day ahead of the target turnaround time of 15 working days. Other types of application submitted through Passport Express, such as first time applications or applications to replace lost, stolen or damaged passports take longer due to additional security checks.

In recent weeks we had higher than average turnaround times for some categories of application owing to high application volumes and disruption caused by adverse weather conditions and the subsequent closure of the Dublin and Cork passport offices for 2 days. However as outlined the turnaround times have considerably reduce and in many cases are now shorter than the published target times. My Department continues to closely monitor the level of passport demand to ensure that all resources are effectively deployed. Measures taken by the Passport Service include the recruitment of additional staff and the use of targeted overtime.

The number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff permanently employed by my Department and assigned to the Passport Service stood at 322 at the beginning of the year. This compares to 310 FTE staff assigned to the Passport Service at the same point last year. This year, since these figures were released, over 20 additional permanent staff have started with the Passport Service.

In addition to this, in order to respond to seasonal demands and application increases, the Passport Service received sanction for 220 Temporary Clerical Officers (“TCOs”) to be appointed to the Passport Offices in Dublin and Cork this year. The vast majority of these TCOs are already in place with the remaining TCOs expected to be fully trained and in place by the end of March at the latest. Targeted overtime for the Passport Service was also sanctioned to increase processing capacity.

In managing increasing application volumes, my Department’s approach has not been merely to recruit or assign additional staff but to continue to implement service improvements in order to provide an exceptional service and minimise the impact high application volumes have on turnaround times. The Passport Reform Programme is delivering major upgrades to the passport service technology platforms and business processes as well as significant customer service improvements. The award winning online passport application service will continue to make a major contribution to the effective management of application volumes by allowing existing resources to be more effectively deployed within the Passport Service.

Foreign Conflicts

154. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps he is taking along with EU and UN partners to bring a total cessation to the seven-year civil war in Syria; the steps he is taking to support humanitarian initiatives to help families and individuals in the worst affected districts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13603/18]

168. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the responses to the UN Security Council resolution on a UN-mandated truce, particularly in view of the appalling humanitarian tragedy in Ghouta. [14082/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 154 and 168 together.

The situation in Syria remains of utmost concern. The conflict, which is now in its eighth

year, has cost over 400,000 lives. Over 13 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria, including close to 3 million people trapped in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. Over 6 million people are displaced internally, and a further 5.5 million have fled to neighbouring countries and the wider region. The recent increase in violence in Syria, in particular the vicious siege of Eastern Ghouta, underscores the extent to which an end to the violence is urgently needed in order to relieve the suffering of the Syrian people.

Ireland fully supports the UN-led political negotiations to end the conflict based on the 2012 Geneva Communiqué and UN Security Council resolution 2254. The EU provides direct assistance to the UN-led Geneva peace talks and has launched, in coordination with the UN, an initiative to develop political dialogue with key actors from the region to identify common ground.

I was present at the UN Security Council briefing on Eastern Ghouta in New York last month at which UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres appealed for an immediate suspension of violence in Eastern Ghouta to allow for the delivery of humanitarian aid, and for evacuations. Ireland strongly welcomed the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2401 calling for an immediate ceasefire and unhindered humanitarian access on 24 February. Ireland regrets that this has not yet been implemented and calls on the international community to redouble efforts to ensure the immediate and full implementation.

EU Foreign Ministers discussed the situation in Syria at their informal meeting on 15 February and again at the Foreign Affairs Council meetings on 26 February and 19 March. The EU and its Member States have to date mobilised more than €10.4 billion for humanitarian, stabilisation and resilience assistance inside Syria and in neighbouring countries, making the EU the largest single donor to the effort. The EU hosted a donors' conference for Syria in April 2017 at which pledges totalling €5.6 billion were made, and will host another donors' conference for Syria in April 2018.

Since 2012, Ireland has contributed over €90 million to the humanitarian effort in response to the conflict in Syria, including €25 million in 2017 alone. Through our annual contributions to EU Institutions, Ireland also supports the EU's humanitarian response to the Syria crisis. Ireland also supports a broad range of efforts to ensure full legal accountability for all war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria.

Foreign Conflicts

155. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he and his EU colleagues have contacted their Turkish counterparts to request the immediate cessation of hostilities and withdrawal of Turkish forces from Kurdish cities and towns in north west Syria, in particular Idlib province; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13604/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The conflict in Syria, and the destabilising impact it has had on the wider region, remain a source of deep concern. Clearly, a comprehensive, inclusive political solution to the conflict is urgently needed, both to end the suffering of the Syrian people and to prevent any further turmoil in the Middle East.

Ireland fully supports the UN-led political negotiations to end the conflict based on the 2012 Geneva Communiqué and UN Security Council resolution 2254. The EU provides direct assistance to the UN-led Geneva peace talks and has launched, in coordination with the UN, an initiative to develop political dialogue with key actors from the region to identify common ground.

Ireland strongly welcomed the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2401 calling for an immediate ceasefire and unhindered humanitarian access on 24 February. Ireland regrets that this has not yet been implemented and calls on the international community to redouble efforts to ensure the immediate and full implementation.

I am particularly concerned by the impact of the recent fighting in the Afrin region, including the displacement of over 100,000 civilians. Officials from my Department met with the Turkish Ambassador to Ireland in early February shortly after the commencement of the Turkish operation. They conveyed Ireland's overarching concern for the protection of civilians, including in the context of this particular operation, and urged caution to avoid escalating the conflict any further.

Ireland understands Turkey's concern about the conflict raging on its southern border. Turkey has borne a heavy burden in terms of knock-on effects of the conflict, including in terms of migration and spill-over of violence. However, our primary concern is for the safety and well-being of civilians on both sides of the border, especially displaced and vulnerable communities.

I call on all parties to exercise restraint in order to avoid any further exacerbation of this already fragile situation and to cooperate in the effort to find a political solution under UN auspices which alone can bring lasting peace to Syria.

Passport Controls

156. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to allow the new public services card to be used as an alternative to a passport; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13679/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Passports are internationally recognised travel documents which attest to the identity and nationality of the bearer. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) is a UN specialised agency which defines in detail the required format for a passport. For example in a type 3 document (a standard passport book) the machine-readable zone must span two lines, and each line must be 44 characters long. The following information must be provided in the zone: name, passport number, nationality, date of birth, sex, and passport expiration date.

The Passport Service launched the Passport Card in October 2015. This credit card sized document complies with ICAO specifications and can be used by adult Irish passport holders for travel to 31 countries in total including the EU/EEA and Switzerland and incorporates the very highest levels of cutting-edge security measures. Since its launch, the Passport Service has issued over 90,000 passport cards to Irish citizens residing in the state and across the world. I would encourage all adult citizens who hold a valid passport to consider applying for a passport card.

Trade Relations

157. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to raise the issue of increasing trade ties between the EU and India at the next EU Foreign Affairs Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13696/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The agenda for the next EU Foreign Affairs Council does not include trade ties between the EU

and India as a topic for discussion. As such, raising the issue would not be appropriate. The EU-India Strategy will be reviewed in the coming months, so the issue of increasing trade ties between the EU and India will undoubtedly be raised for discussion in due course.

Trade issues were discussed at the 14th annual Summit between India and the EU held in New Delhi on 6th October last at which India was represented by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the EU was represented by Donald Tusk, President of the European Council and by Jean Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission.

The leaders reviewed the wide-ranging cooperation between India and the EU under the India-EU Strategic Partnership and committed themselves to work in a result-oriented and mutually beneficial manner to further strengthen the Partnership, *inter alia*, by deepening trade co-operation and enhancing investment flows in both directions. They expressed their shared commitment to strengthening the Economic Partnership between India and the EU and noted the ongoing efforts of both sides to re-engage actively towards timely re-launching negotiations for a comprehensive and mutually beneficial India-EU Broad Based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA).

In addition to regular talks at expert level on technical trade matters, there will be a meeting of EU and Indian chief negotiators in the coming weeks to review progress and assess the prospects for a substantive agreement on trade and investment.

Ireland is fully supportive of these developments and we look forward to the re-launch of BTIA negotiations.

Human Rights

158. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the assassination of a person (details supplied) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; if this murder will be raised with his Brazilian counterparts; and if he will request the institution of an independent, transparent and internationally verified process of investigation into this crime. [13751/18]

165. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on calls for a prompt and transparent investigation into the murder of a person (details supplied); if his attention has been drawn to the concerns of the human rights community and NGOs; and if he will raise the matter with the Brazilian ambassador. [14079/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I propose to take Questions Nos. 158 and 165 together.

I am aware of the case to which the Deputy refers and I would like to avail of this opportunity to convey my condolences to the family of the victim.

Such acts of violence are entirely unacceptable.

I echo the comments of Minister Joe McHugh who, in the course of his recent St. Patrick's Day visit to Brazil, publicly condemned the killing and urged that the perpetrators of this hateful crime be swiftly brought to justice.

I also echo the European Parliament's statement of 20 March last which urged the Government of Brazil to carry out an immediate, thorough and transparent investigation into the assassination of Ms. Marielle Franco in order to identify all those responsible, bring them before an

independent tribunal, and punish them under the law.

The Government remains committed to the protection of human rights internationally and will continue to advocate, both at EU and UN level, on issues relating to the protection and defence of human rights everywhere.

Extradition Arrangements

159. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the arrest of a person (details supplied) in the Czech Republic on foot of an extradition warrant from the Turkish Government; his views on Turkey's use of extradition warrants to silence critics of the Turkish Government abroad; his further views on whether the person may be extradited to Turkey in which it is deemed that person's human rights will be violated; his plans to oppose the persons extradition to Turkey; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13753/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am aware of the case in question and I understand that proceedings in the Czech Republic have been halted since the individual concerned is no longer in that country. The execution of extradition warrants is a matter for the courts and it would not be appropriate for me, therefore, to comment on the merits of individual cases. The European Union is involved in a process of engagement and open dialogue with Turkey in areas of common interest and, as the Deputy will be aware, the EU-Turkey leaders' meeting which took place in Varna, Bulgaria, yesterday included an assessment of recent developments in Turkey, including the rule of law and fundamental freedoms.

School Placement

160. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if there are guidelines or legislation in place to ensure school places for children of Irish citizens who are serving the State overseas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13790/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Officers serving the state abroad may be accompanied by family members on postings and supports are in place to ensure that children of school-going age are in a position to continue their education with minimal disruption.

As officers prepare to return from posting, they are on request provided with a letter from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade attesting to their service overseas. The letter is provided to schools to ensure that they are informed of the requirement to serve abroad and the reasons why children would have moved school during a given educational cycle.

The issue of school admissions policy guidelines and related legislation is proper to the Department of Education and Skills.

Visa Agreements

161. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if there is discretion available to a person (details supplied) in a scenario. [13986/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Working Holiday Agreement between Ireland and New Zealand has given thousands of young people the opportunity to live and work overseas since its introduction. It is a programme which offers valuable experiences both personally and professionally.

The terms and conditions for the programme are well-defined and subject to an international agreement between New Zealand and Ireland. One condition of receiving a visa under the programme is that applicants must be aged between 18 and 30 years when applying. Unfortunately, there is no discretion possible with regard to the age of an applicant under the New Zealand Working Holiday Agreement.

New Zealand passport holders do not require a visa to visit Ireland on holiday for three months or less. There are also other pathways to visiting and working in Ireland for such people, depending on their circumstances. Full information on the possibilities can be found on the website of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) – www.inis.gov.ie.

Passport Applications

162. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of a passport application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13989/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): All passport applications are subject to the terms of the Passports Act, 2008 (“the Act”), which provides the legal basis for the policies and practices that are applied by the Passport Service.

Section 10 of the Act broadly provides that a passport will issue in the name of a citizen as it appears on his/her birth certificate. Issuing a passport in a different name is permitted under the Act in situations such as marriage, adoption or gender reassignment, where civil or legal documents are available to verify the change. In all other cases where an individual wishes to apply for a passport in a different name, the Act specifically requires evidence of usage of the new name over a two-year period.

I am informed by officials in the Passport Service that the person in question wishes to have a passport issued in a name other than that on their birth certificate but that they has not supplied acceptable supporting documentation. The Passport Service has advised the applicant of the requirements. Until such a time as the applicant can provide the relevant documents, the Passport Service, in line with the Act, will be unable to issue a passport in the alternative name.

Given that a name change effectively replaces an existing identity with a new one, the Passport Service must ensure that stringent checks are in place to mitigate any associated risks. The Passport Service’s practice is in line with the relevant legislation and is intended to safeguard the high international reputation of the Irish passport and, in turn, protect the wellbeing and security of our citizens travelling abroad.

Foreign Policy Review

163. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the review of strategic relations with Germany; the objectives of the exercise; when it commenced; the policy areas being reviewed; the Departments and Ministers that are involved; the timelines involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13995/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): On 11 December last year I announced a review of Ireland's relations with the Federal Republic of Germany and charged our ambassador in Berlin with undertaking the task. My aim in announcing the review was to strengthen this most important of relationships for Ireland both at the bilateral level and in the context of our common EU membership. The review – which began before Christmas - covers the full spectrum of our relations with Germany, including its political, economic, social and cultural aspects. This review is timely, given the enormous challenges that Ireland is facing in a rapidly changing EU and global environment.

Germany is the world's fourth largest economy and a major player internationally as well as in the EU. It is the second-largest inward investor in Ireland; our fourth-largest merchandise trading partner and one with which we enjoy a trade surplus. Germany is also our third-largest source of tourism with some 650,000 visiting Ireland in 2016.

I am convinced that there is still scope to build further on these numbers.

All relevant government departments whose work touches on the terms of the review have been consulted, and their views are being fed into a draft report which is at an advanced stage of preparation. I intend publishing the review very shortly.

Northern Ireland

164. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has discussed the possibility of appointing an independent chair to facilitate talks in Northern Ireland. [13930/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Over the course of many months, the Irish and British Governments, as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, have worked tirelessly to support and facilitate the parties in their efforts to form an Executive. The devolved, power-sharing institutions of the Good Friday Agreement are the best means for achieving accountable, representative decision-making for all the people of Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, to date, it has not proved possible to reach an agreement on the formation of an Executive, despite intensive engagement. In light of this, the Government has been working with the British Government to consider means by which we can support the political process, in accordance with the Agreement, in the period ahead.

I am in very regular contact with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in order to determine how both Governments, as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, can address the current impasse and secure the re-establishment of the Executive and Assembly. This includes consideration of the possibility that an independent chair would be appointed to facilitate talks. I will be speaking with the Secretary of State again this week and we will meet in early April.

I remain in contact also with the political parties in Northern Ireland, in working to ensure that every avenue is pursued and all possibilities are considered in seeking to secure a return to devolved power-sharing government, as provided for under the Agreement.

The Taoiseach has spoken with Prime Minister May and emphasised the Government's full commitment to the Good Friday Agreement, and our determination to secure the effective operation of all of its institutions.

As co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, the Irish and British Governments have an obligation to uphold and protect the letter and spirit of that Agreement.

The Good Friday Agreement remains the indispensable framework for providing stable, inclusive, power-sharing government for all the people of Northern Ireland and for sustaining our interlocking relationships - within Northern Ireland, on the island of Ireland and between the UK and Ireland.

Question No. 165 answered with Question No. 158.

Human Rights

166. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the human rights situation in Bahrain; and the way in which the Irish objective criteria applies in the case of Bahrain at present. [14080/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): The deterioration of the human rights situation in Bahrain has been the subject of a number of Questions in this House recently, and continues to be of considerable concern. As I have previously outlined, despite repeatedly stating its commitment to improving its human rights record, the Bahraini Government appears to be targeting those who express disagreement with or criticism of the Government. A number of worrying developments suggest an increasingly restrictive attitude to those opposing or challenging the Government in any way. Statements from the Bahraini Government on its commitment to safeguarding human rights enshrined in the Bahraini Constitution ring hollow when there are so many examples of violations of the most fundamental freedoms, including those of opinion and expression. Ireland’s concerns about human rights issues and restrictions of civil liberties in Bahrain is regularly conveyed to the Bahraini authorities, including through the Bahraini Embassy in London and through Ireland’s (non-resident) Ambassador to Bahrain. Most recently, last month, officials from my Department met with the Ambassador of Bahrain and Embassy officials in Dublin, and raised Ireland’s concerns about the human rights situation in Bahrain. At the 32nd session of the Human Rights Council in June 2016, Ireland, on behalf of a cross-regional group of States, delivered a statement proposing possible objective criteria which could guide the Council when deciding how to act on emerging situations of concern. These criteria included, among others, whether there has been a call for action by the UN Secretary General, the High Commissioner for Human Rights or a relevant UN organ, body or agency.

These criteria, often referred to as the ‘Irish objective criteria’ may offer a useful guide, to help decide, in an objective and non-selective manner, when it is appropriate and necessary for the Council to engage with a concerned State. These same independent factors are also a valuable guide for States in assessing whether to bring a specific country to the attention of the Council by issuing for, example a statement on the matter at the Human Rights Council.

Officials from my Department raised ongoing human rights concerns with Bahrain in the context of its Universal Periodic Review, which took place in Geneva in May 2017, and more recently at the Human Rights Council in Geneva. At the Human Rights Council session earlier this month, Ireland supported an EU statement under Item 4 (Human Rights situations that require the Council’s attention) which reiterated calls on Bahrain “to maintain its commitments as to the respect of freedom of speech and human rights defenders.” Ireland also made reference to Bahrain in our national Item 4 statement.

My Department will continue to monitor the situation in Bahrain, and will continue to call on the Bahraini Government to make good on their stated commitment to make progress in the area of human rights.

My Department will continue to monitor the situation in Bahrain, and will continue to call on the Bahraini Government to make good on their stated commitment to make progress in the area of human rights.

Human Rights Investigations

167. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent of the engagement by the embassy in Mexico on the human rights situation relating to the recent Honduras election. [14081/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Diplomatic relations with Honduras are maintained through our Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York and our Embassy in Mexico is not accredited to Honduras. Officials in the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade have been closely monitoring developments in Honduras following elections which took place there on 26 November, 2017. Officials have been in contact with the European External Action Service, which works through its delegation in Tegucigalpa, and have also met with human rights defenders and civil society organisations active in that country.

I am glad of this opportunity to condemn unreservedly the loss of life in the aftermath of those elections and wish to express my sincere condolences to the families of the victims.

Question No. 168 answered with Question No. 154.

Northern Ireland

169. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade when it is planned to have a British Irish intergovernmental conference; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14170/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): Over the course of many months, the Irish and British Governments, as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, have worked tirelessly to support and facilitate the parties in their efforts to form an Executive. The devolved, power-sharing institutions of the Good Friday Agreement are the best means for achieving accountable, representative decision-making for all the people of Northern Ireland. The electorate in Northern Ireland affirmed their support for power-sharing through the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement in May 1998 and have provided a mandate to the political parties to form an Executive and Assembly. Everyone agrees that devolved power-sharing institutions are in the best interests of the people of Northern Ireland and the Government continues to work with the British Government and the parties in Northern Ireland to support that outcome.

Unfortunately, to date, it has not proved possible to reach an agreement on the formation of an Executive, despite intensive engagement. In light of this, the Government has been working with the British Government to consider means by which we can support the political process, in accordance with the Agreement, in the period ahead.

I am in very regular contact with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in order to determine how both Governments, as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, can address the current impasse and secure the re-establishment of the Executive and Assembly. I will be speaking with the Secretary of State again this week and we will meet in early April.

As part of these ongoing discussions, I have indicated to the Secretary of State that it would now be appropriate to convene a British Irish Intergovernmental Conference in order for both Governments to formally engage through the structures of the Good Friday Agreement on next steps. The Secretary of State indicated that she wished to reflect on this suggestion and it will form part of our next discussion.

The British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference is an important institution of the Good Friday Agreement, bringing together the Irish and British Governments under Strand Three of the Agreement on matters of mutual interest within the competence of both Governments. It does not involve any derogation from the sovereignty of either Government.

International Agreements

170. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the historic status quo agreement on the rights of all inhabitants of Jerusalem; and the way in which he and his European Union partners will ensure that the agreement continues to be adhered to. [14243/18]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are considerable and well-known sensitivities in relation to the position of the Christian communities in Israel and Palestine, and also to the Holy Places of Christians, Jews and Muslims, especially in and around Jerusalem. Concerns around these issues have led to significant tensions and even violence in recent years, which we have discussed in the Oireachtas. The issues involved can be very complex and multifaceted. There are many Christian denominations present, and their churches and traditional status and rights predate not only the foundation of Israel but even the former British Mandate, and go back to the Ottoman period or even earlier. Some European partners have historical and treaty links to various Christian denominations, and the Jordanian Government retains a role as guardians of the Muslim holy places. Jerusalem is uniquely sensitive, and Israel's discriminatory treatment of Palestinians and their land rights under the occupation has meant that any proposed changes to the regime pertaining to religious properties are viewed with deep suspicion. I do not wish to comment on the specific issues which led to the brief closure as a protest of some of the Christian churches in Jerusalem last month. While the immediate threat was lifted, and the churches reopened, these matters are not resolved and could recur.

However, both Ireland and the European Union have consistently and on a number of occasions in recent years stressed the important principle that there should be no change in the *status quo* with regard to religious affairs, properties and rights in Jerusalem and the Occupied Territory, pending the final resolution of the position of the city and the holy places in a peace agreement. I have made this point myself directly to the Israeli authorities, and I repeat that principle again now. My Department has also met with religious representatives from the city and the region. We will continue to do so, and to address the Israeli authorities on these issues.

Tax Agreements

171. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Finance the actions that will now be taken before the OECD makes final recommendations on digital tax. [14155/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The OCED Task Force on the Digital Economy Interim Report marks an important step in the ongoing work being undertaken by the Inclusive Framework on BEPS since 2015 and makes a significant contribution towards

our understanding of the challenges arising from the digitisation of the economy and how the international tax system should adapt to address any issues arising.

That the OECD has been able to publish the interim report earlier than originally anticipated bodes well for the timely publication of the Final Report in 2020, and helps reassure those who are doubtful of the OECD's ability to deliver a globally agreed sustainable evidence based outcome.

Ireland has been a committed participant in, and strong supporter of, tax reform efforts led by the OECD through the BEPS process. We believe any policy approaches must focus on value creation – tax should be paid where value is created, not simply where a transaction happens and this view has been endorsed by the Report. For new business models, the idea of value creation is not as simple as it is for manufacturing companies which is why the ongoing OECD analysis is so important.

There is a clear consensus in that further consideration is needed of the key aspects of the existing tax framework, nexus and profit allocation rules that would consider the impacts of digitalisation.

It also clear from the Report that there is no consensus among the members of Inclusive Framework as to the merits of, or indeed need for, any interim measures to be introduced before the outcome of this further work. The report acknowledges that such measures are likely have adverse impacts on investment and growth and risk increasing double taxation and complexity for taxpayers and tax authorities alike. For those countries who wish to persist towards implementing interim measures in advance of an agreed global approach, the Report has identified some hazards to be avoided so that the damaging effects are mitigated in so far as it is possible to do so.

I share the view expressed in the Report that further analysis is needed to achieve a globally agreed, evidence based solution, sustainable in the long run and focussed on aligning taxing rights with the location of real substantive value creating activity. It has long been our position that it has been the mis-match arising from different tax systems which has facilitated aggressive tax planning and the only sustainable way to address this is for countries to cooperate globally through the OECD.

Ireland will continue to actively engage with work in the area of the digital economy at both OECD and EU level. As you are aware, the European Commission have also last week published proposals for two Directives in this area. We have been a strong voice in the many tax directives that have been agreed at EU level in recent years and we look forward to critically assessing and discussing the Commission's recent proposals with all Member States.

Tax Reliefs Application

172. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the reintroduction of tax relief on union subscriptions for workers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13548/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): A review of the appropriate treatment for tax purposes of trade union subscriptions and professional body fees was carried out by my Department in 2016 and included in the 2016 report on tax expenditures published on budget day 2016. The review may be found at the following link:

(http://www.budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2017/Documents/Tax_Expenditures_Report%202016_

final.pdf)

The review concluded that:

“... analysis of the scheme using the principles laid down by the Department’s Tax Expenditure Guidelines shows that it fails to reach the evaluation threshold to warrant introduction in this manner.

The reinstatement of this tax relief would have no justifiable policy rationale and does not express a defined policy objective. Given that individuals join trade unions largely for the well-known benefits of membership, and the potential value of the relief to an individual would equate to just over €1 per week, this scheme would have little to no incentive effect on the numbers choosing to join. There is no specific market failure that needs to be addressed by such a scheme, and it would consist largely of deadweight .”

Given the conclusions of the review, I have no plans to reintroduce such a relief.

Tax Code

173. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to update Ireland’s limited partnership legislation with regard to the funds industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13592/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Irish Funds Industry Association developed proposals consistent with IFS2020 and timed to take advantage of the Capital Markets Union agenda to promote the establishment of private equity and venture capital funds vehicles in Ireland. Private Equity are typically constituted as partnerships and such funds are not common in Ireland.

The Department of Finance analysed the proposals put forward by industry and as the proposals have implications on a number of areas including company law, regulatory framework and taxation, engagement with a number of stakeholders took place. These included the Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation, Central Bank of Ireland, Revenue Commissioners, and other industry stakeholders.

The ultimate aim of the proposed amendments is to help ensure that Ireland remains one of the leading funds domiciles in Europe, while maintaining a robust regulatory and supervisory framework for investment funds domiciled here.

At its meeting on 18 July 2017, the Government approved the legal drafting of the Investment Limited Partnership (Amendment) Bill, 2017.

Heads of Bill were submitted to the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel. A draftsman has been appointed and officials are engaging with him and relevant stakeholders on the drafting process.

Revenue Commissioners Resources

174. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Finance if funding will be provided for the purchase of two additional mobile X-ray scanners for the Revenue Commissioners; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13694/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that they currently have three mobile container scanners and a specialist vehicle incorporating x-ray facilities and radiation detection technology for monitoring baggage and smaller items of cargo. All mobile scanners are available for deployment at ports and locations such as warehouses, as required.

Revenue monitors and assesses its needs in relation to detection technology on an ongoing basis, having regard to risk, developments in scanning and detection technology and the obsolescence of existing technology over time. Revenue has successfully applied from OLAF (European Anti Fraud Office) for a funding grant for part of the cost towards the purchase of a new mobile x-ray scanner van in 2018. I and my Department are open to considering any request from Revenue as regards the replacement or acquisition of new technology to support the important work of tackling fraud and smuggling.

Question No. 175 answered with Question No. 96.

Banking Sector Regulation

176. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance his definition of non-performing loans; if it includes loans that have been restructured and that the borrower has adhered to the conditions of the restructured loan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13666/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In answering the Deputy's question, it is useful if I start by giving some historic context. During the height of the financial crisis a key focus of the authorities was on stabilising and ultimately reducing mortgage arrears through the implementation of sustainable mortgage solutions that were agreed with borrowers.

This led to the Central Bank of Ireland (CBI) introducing public mortgage arrears resolution targets (MART) for the banks in H1 2013. As the MART process was rolled out a split mortgage solution or a part capital and interest solution that met certain criteria were accepted by the CBI as being sustainable for the purposes of these targets.

Since the establishment of the Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM) in November 2014, the focus has shifted from reducing mortgage arrears levels to reducing Non-performing Loans (NPLs). This shift in focus has been accompanied by a new strict definition Europe-wide of what constitutes an NPL by the European Banking Authority (EBA) which means that certain restructures are deemed NPL even if customers are meeting the revised payment schedule.

Officials in my Department met with staff of the SSM at the highest level on two occasions since late 2016. In the course of their discussions they outlined the background and history to the restructuring effort in Ireland and questioned the logic of now classifying some types of restructured loans, including certain split mortgages, as NPL indefinitely.

While my Department has been informed that the SSM is looking into the regulatory treatment of split mortgages across a number of European member states I have no evidence at this point that this categorisation is going to change.

Aside from direct interaction with the SSM, Department officials have also been actively involved in the discussions on NPLs through its involvement in the European Council's Financial Services Committee subgroup on NPLs, and the more recent European Commission Expert Group on NPLs. While this has ensured that Ireland's views are voiced and considered on the matter, ultimately the final arbiter on the resolution of NPLs for the Irish banks is the SSM.

European Financial Forum

177. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance if he will report on his Department's or his involvement in the European Financial Forum. [7006/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The third annual European Financial Forum (EFF) was held in Dublin Castle on 31 January 2018. The event, which was hosted by my colleague Minister of State for Financial Services and Insurance Michael D'Arcy TD, is now in its third year and is a key deliverable as part of the Government's International Financial Services 2020 Strategy.

Following a review of the 2017 forum IDA Ireland were tasked with planning and executing the European Financial Forum 2018. As the department responsible for the delivery of the IFS2020 Strategy officials from my department engaged regularly with IDA Ireland as to progress on the planning of the event and assisted with invitations to overseas speakers and delegates where required.

The EFF 2018 was a tremendous success with almost 600 delegates in attendance from 24 countries representing over 350 different organisations. Preliminary planning for the 2019 forum is currently underway, led once again by IDA Ireland. We hope that the 2019 EFF will build on the continued success of the EFF as a showcase for Ireland's financial services environment and Ireland as a location for high quality investment.

The evening before the EFF my colleague Minister of State D'Arcy launched the IFS2020 Action Plan 2018. The Action Plan outlines 43 measures designed to improve Ireland's financial services environment, all to be actioned in 2018.

In addition to Minister of State D'Arcy hosting the EFF, I had the opportunity to engage with the Vice President of the European Commission Valdis Dombrovskis in a joint closing keynote address and conversation.

The purpose of the Forum is to support IFS2020 and the Strategy's aim to create 10,000 net new jobs in the international financial services sector, which translates to a 30% increase in those employed in the sector. At this year's EFF it was confirmed that to date almost 7,000 net new jobs have been created in the sector since the Strategy began, representing 70% of the target, with two years remaining.

Question No. 178 answered with Question No. 87.

Economic Competitiveness

179. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which Ireland's economic development compares favourably with other European countries within the eurozone, notwithstanding the impact of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13649/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The CSO's preliminary estimate for full-year GDP growth in 2017 is 7.8 per cent. According to Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, in 2017 the EU and euro area economies grew by 2.4 per cent and 2.3 per cent respectively. This would suggest that Ireland was the fastest growing economy in the EU in 2017. While the 2017 outturn is based on preliminary quarterly data which is highly volatile and prone to revision, the numbers provide clear evidence of continued momentum in the economy. Other indicators such as consumer spending, labour market trends and taxation

receipts confirm Ireland's strong economic position.

According to the European Commission, Ireland is also expected to be among the fastest growing economies in Europe this year and next. The European Commission expects Ireland's economy to grow by 4.4 per cent in 2018 and 3.1 per cent in 2019. This compares with growth of 2.3 per cent this year and of 2.0 per cent next year for the EU and the euro area respectively. The Commission notes that consumer spending and construction investment are forecast to drive GDP growth in the short-term. Strong employment growth, particularly for full-time jobs, should underpin a rise in disposable income and household consumption over the next two years.

My Department will publish updated forecasts with the Stability Programme Update 2018 in April. Given the strength of activity last year, growth forecasts for this year are likely to be revised upwards.

However, economic challenges remain, mainly linked to the outcome of the negotiations between the EU and the UK and the potential changes to the international taxation and trading environments. The best way to deal with the challenges we face, and to support continued economic growth, is through continued implementation of productivity-oriented policies along with sustainable public finances. That is what this Government will continue to do.

Tax Avoidance

180. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if he has further examined the issue of tax avoidance by so-called vulture funds; if such entities are subject to corporation tax in respect of interest earned and other banking activities here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13667/18]

183. **Deputy Brendan Howlin** asked the Minister for Finance if the issue of tax avoidance by so-called vulture funds has been further examined; if such entities are subject to corporation tax in respect of interest earned and other banking activities here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13623/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 180 and 183 together.

The term "so-called vulture funds", while not being consistently defined, is often used in public discourse to refer to variety of different types of investors from banks to private equity to small groups of individual investors. In recent times, a common feature of these investors is that they have acquired loan books, often but not exclusively, where the loans were in the non-performing category. Recently the term has also been used to refer to groups of investors that have broadened their scope to become active in other parts of the Irish financial services market.

However for the purposes of the reply from a taxation perspective, I assume the Deputies are referring to the use of the section 110 regime which is often linked to the debate on the activities of such funds.

Section 110 is intended to create a tax neutral regime for bona-fide securitisation and structured finance purposes. It has been part of our corporation tax code since 1991, with significant amendments in 2003. Securitisation involves the creation of tradeable securities out of an income stream or projected future income stream generated by financial assets. The transaction can involve the use of a special purpose securitisation vehicle to facilitate the transaction and issue the securities.

Securitisation allows banks to raise capital and to share risk, and by providing a repackaging and resale market for corporate debt, it lowers the cost of debt financing.

A section 110 company will be taxed on all of its income but will obtain a deduction for its expenses paid out to investors. Effectively, the investors will be taxed in accordance with the rules in their own jurisdiction.

The section 110 regime was designed to improve Ireland's offering as a location for the conduct of financial services. It has achieved that broad goal and the financial services industry now makes use of these vehicles as a support to financial intermediation. Such financing is useful for the productive economy as it can underpin the supply of finance to industries and companies in Ireland, Europe and further afield.

Ireland is not unique in having a specific regime for securitisations. The importance of securitisation has been recognised by the European Commission through their work on the Capital Markets Union. This is a European Commission initiative to mobilise capital in Europe. A main objective of which is to build a sustainable securitisation regime across the European Union. The Capital Markets Union specifically states how alternative sources of finance are more widely used in other parts of the world, and the widely held view is that should play a bigger role in providing financing to companies that struggle to get funding, especially SMEs and start-ups.

Section 22 Finance Act 2016 restricts the use of the section 110 regime to minimise Irish tax liabilities on Irish property or distressed debt transactions. The core effect of the amendment removes the possibility for section 110 companies to use what are known as 'profit participating notes,' or PPNs, to sweep Irish property or distressed debt profits out of the company in a way that ensures little or no Irish tax liability arises.

Credit Union Services

181. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance if his Department is examining an amendment to the Credit Union and Co-operation with Overseas Regulators Act 2012 to allow credit unions lend to affordable housing bodies and local authorities as recommended by the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13669/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I can advise the Deputy that common bond restrictions limit the potential for credit unions to lend to housing bodies and local authorities, either directly or on a syndicated basis.

As previously set out in my reply to parliamentary question No. 55 for written answer on 22nd February 2018, the Credit Union and Co-Operation with Overseas Regulators Act 2012 introduced changes to the Credit Union Act, 1997 (the 1997 Act). Since 1 January 2016, section 43 of the 1997 Act provides that the Central Bank may prescribe investments in which a credit union may invest its funds.

The Central Bank undertook a review of the investment framework for credit unions in 2017. This review resulted in the publication of Consultation Paper 109 (CP109) which consulted on potential changes to the investment framework for credit unions. One of the proposals in CP109 was that credit unions be permitted to provide funding for the provision of social housing to Tier 3 Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs).

Submissions to CP109 were broadly supportive of credit unions providing funding to Tier 3 AHBs with a significant number of those in favour citing the alignment of the social goals of both the credit union movement and the AHB sector as the principal rationale for permitting this type of investment.

Taking account of the feedback provided to CP109, amended regulations commenced on 1 March 2018 which permit credit unions to provide funding to Tier 3 AHBs for the provision of social housing. The maximum permitted investment amount per credit union is 50% of regulatory reserves where a credit union has total assets of at least €100 million and 25% of regulatory reserves for all other credit unions. These limits may facilitate a combined sector investment in Tier 3 AHBs of close to €700 million.

The Central Bank is open to considering further investment proposals. Where the Central Bank receives detailed proposals which can demonstrate that an investment could fall within the appropriate risk profile for credit union investments, it will consider further amendments to the investment regulations to facilitate such investments in the future.

The Central Bank has committed to undertaking and publishing analysis of credit union sector investments, two years post commencement of the amending investment regulations for credit unions, to assess and analyse the actual impact which the changes to the investment regulations have had.

Question No. 182 answered with Question No. 106.

Question No. 183 answered with Question No. 180.

Carbon Tax Implementation

184. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the OECD report entitled, Taxing Energy Use 2018, on the role of carbon taxes here and throughout the OECD. [11010/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Climate change is a great global challenge and imposing carbon taxation on pollutant fossil fuels, as part of a broader strategy involving both taxation and non-taxation measures, incentivises the uptake of cleaner and more sustainable fuel sources.

The OECD report, Taxing Energy Use 2018, brings together statistical data from 42 OECD and G20 countries and allows for comparison of effective energy tax rates on energy use. The report recommends the imposition of carbon tax as an important measure to address climate change and provides food for thought as to how this should be done.

The OECD also recommends complementary policies, such as grants to improve energy efficiency, in place of tax exemptions or reliefs. This has been the long standing practice in Ireland with over 207,000 homes receiving in excess of €220m through the Better Energy Homes Scheme and over 134,000 low income households receiving free energy efficiency upgrades at a cost of €198m.

A review of the carbon tax in Ireland is underway as part of the joint research programme between the ESRI and the Department of Finance. It is expected that this review will inform decisions for Budget 2019.

Vacant Properties Data

185. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance the number of vacant properties which have been surrendered to mortgage lenders around the country; the average length of the vacancy; the number of vacant properties held by the Insolvency Service of Ireland; the average length of the vacancy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [11136/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I have been advised by the Central Bank of Ireland that while it collects data on homes voluntarily surrendered to mortgage lenders, they do not distinguish between vacant or occupied.

The latest *Mortgage Arrears and Repossession Statistics* published by the Central Bank, indicate that there were 1,717 properties in mortgage lenders possession at the beginning of the fourth quarter of 2017. A total of 311 properties were taken into possession by lenders during the quarter, down from 396 properties in the previous quarter. Of the properties taken into possession during the quarter, 138 were repossessed on foot of a Court Order, while the remaining 173 were voluntarily surrendered or abandoned.

I have been informed by the Department of Justice & Equality that the Insolvency Service of Ireland (ISI) does not hold any property.

Employment Investment Incentive Scheme

186. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Finance if the concerns expressed at EU level regarding the employee incentive and investment scheme have now been resolved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13633/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): During the preparations for Finance Bill 2017 it came to light that the Employment and Investment Incentive (EII) was potentially not compliant with state aid rules (specifically Art. 21(3) of the General Block Exemption Regulations) and that it should be amended as a matter of urgency to bring it within state aid rules. The relevant provisions of the Taxes consolidation Act 1997 were amended by the Finance Act 2017 to correct this error.

The EII scheme previously allowed “connected persons” with up to an existing 30% shareholding to invest in a company and get EII relief. The amendment reduces this to 0%. The effect of the changes are to prevent investors from getting tax relief for investing in their own companies. This restriction does not apply if an individual and their relatives make their investments in the company while it is still at very initial stages before it commences any of its activities. I should also emphasise that the restriction does not apply where an individual is only connected with a company through a prior investment to which EII relief applied.

My Department has been in contact with the European Commission to advise it of the potential failure to comply with the General Block Exemption Regulations and the steps taken to correct this. The Commission is continuing to examine the issue.

The Deputy may also wish to note that, as indicated in my press statement of 3 November 2017, the EII scheme will be reviewed in the current year to ensure that it operates as a competitive, efficient and effective measure in accordance with State Aid rules and my Department’s Tax Expenditure Guidelines. Arrangements in this regard are underway.

Question No. 187 answered with Question No. 89.

Central Bank of Ireland

188. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the strategic review of the Central Bank print works; the options under consideration by the bank in regard to the future of the print works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13796/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As communicated in the Central Bank's Strategic Plan (2016 – 2018), the Central Bank announced that it intended to review its strategy for banknote production. The purpose of this review was to determine how the Central Bank meets its Eurosystem obligations for its allocation of annual Euro banknote production.

The review is completed but a decision has not yet been taken on the matter by the Central Bank Commission. However, the matter is scheduled for the Commission meeting at the end of March. The proposal from management involves sourcing the banknotes from within the Eurozone, and ceasing the printing of banknotes at the Central Bank's Currency Centre. The proposal to source banknotes from within the Eurozone is in line with the approach taken in many other national central banks in the Eurozone (i.e. a number of national central banks within the Eurozone do not print banknotes themselves).

This proposed change will have no impact on the supply of banknotes in Ireland, the majority of which are produced elsewhere. All other currency related operation at the Sandyford Currency Centre would continue as normal.

As part of the proposal, the specialist banknote knowledge necessary to source and design banknotes will be retained within the Central Bank of Ireland. The subject of the proposal is the physical printing of the banknotes.

The Central Bank of Ireland is fully cognisant of its obligations to supply currency in all circumstances to the people of Ireland. The proposal is consistent with those obligations.

If the Commission take the decision to cease printing, a total of 45 staff (of the 170 staff in the Central Bank's currency centre) will be impacted. The staff and their representatives are fully aware of the proposal.

The Central Bank does not intend to seek compulsory redundancies and is committed to redeployment and retraining opportunities for impacted staff. A voluntary severance package will also be made available to those staff.

If a decision is taken to cease printing, the Central Bank is committed to engagement with staff representative bodies through the normal industrial relations channels on the implications for impacted staff.

NAMA Transactions

189. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance the person or body to which the National Assets Management Agency sold a site (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13882/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Finance I have no role in respect of NAMA's commercial operations. Accordingly, I am not aware of specific details in relation to this particular transaction nor am I aware of the identity of the purchaser. Furthermore NAMA is subject to legal constraints which prohibit it from disclosing confidential information relating to its debtors and the assets under their control.

The Deputy will be aware that the agency has established a dedicated email address for general queries and representations from Oireachtas members, oir@nama.ie. This email is monitored regularly, and queries are responded to promptly, while observing the statutory principle of debtor confidentiality that is set out in the NAMA Act.

It is important to note that NAMA does not own property. Its role is as a secured lender and the property assets securing NAMA's loan portfolio remain under the ownership and control of debtors and receivers. Where a property is being sold, NAMA's open marketing guidelines require that a sales agent be appointed and the property openly marketed.

Insurance Costs

190. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance the status of the measures that have been taken to meet and engage with insurance companies regarding excessive premiums being charged to consumers, particularly in counties Cavan and Monaghan. [13886/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy should note that in my role as Minister for Finance I am responsible for the development of the legal framework governing financial regulation. Neither I nor the Central Bank can interfere in the pricing of insurance products, as these matters are of a commercial nature, and are determined by insurance companies based on the risks they are willing to accept.

However, it is acknowledged that pricing in the motor insurance sector has been subject to a lot of volatility in recent years, from a point where some premiums appeared to be priced at an unsustainably low level to the more recent experience of large increases.

Indeed, the problem of rising motor insurance premiums was the main impetus for the establishment of the Cost of Insurance Working Group. Its Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance was published in January 2017. The Report makes 33 recommendations with 71 associated actions to be carried out in agreed timeframes, set out within an Action Plan. The Working Group continued its work throughout 2017 and subsequently published the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance in January 2018.

Stakeholder consultation formed the foundation upon which the Working Group's two Reports and their recommendations were developed. This consultation process undertaken by the Working Group involved a wide range of stakeholders representing the different voices within this sector, including Insurance Ireland and the major individual motor insurance providers. The impact of excessive premiums being charged to consumers from all over the country was a feature of this engagement process with industry.

In addition, my Department officials regularly raise specific issues affecting consumers during their ongoing engagement with Insurance Ireland, including within a sub-group formed to implement relevant consumer-focused recommendations from the Motor Report.

Furthermore, Minister of State D'Arcy has separately met with representatives from insurance companies and other relevant stakeholders in relation to a number of issues and the problems resulting from high insurance premiums have been discussed during these engagements.

Insurance Costs

191. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance when consumers will receive a detailed breakdown of their insurance quotes; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [13657/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Deputy should note that there are two recommendations in the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance which specifically aim to provide consumers with more information in respect of their insurance premiums.

Recommendation 2 requires insurers to provide additional information on the premium breakdown to consumers, such as setting out the element of the cost related to the mandatory motor insurance element (third party), in addition to the non-mandatory element (comprehensive). The Central Bank of Ireland conducted a public consultation to seek views from interested stakeholders on this recommendation. This consultation process closed on 9 February last and subsequent amendments to provide for these changes will be made to the Non-Life Insurance (Provision of Information) (Renewal of Policy of Insurance) Regulations (SI No. 74 of 2007). This is on schedule to be completed by the end of Q2 2018, as per the set timeline.

Pursuant to Recommendation 1, a protocol has been agreed between Insurance Ireland and the Department of Finance which aims to explain how a premium is calculated and provides a list of reasons for large increases in premiums. The content of this document is now available on the websites of the major motor insurance providers and will also be provided to policyholders on renewal.

The agreed document is not a bespoke document but consumers will be provided with contact details of their insurance provider in order to enable them to receive more specific information if they do not believe any of the listed reasons apply to their situation. The main reason why a bespoke document cannot be provided is because the complexity of the interaction between the customer-facing systems and the underwriting systems in all modern insurance companies would make it very difficult to delineate specific reasons for an individual premium increase. I am informed that if insurers were to try and link these systems in order to address this issue, it would require very significant IT infrastructural changes at considerable cost. This would be likely to result in higher premiums. In addition, the Cost of Insurance Working Group believes that such an onerous requirement could result in the unintended consequence of discouraging new entrants to the market.

Finally, the Deputy should note that I am seeking to have the previous year's premium included in renewal documentation. In this regard my Department has engaged with Insurance Ireland on this matter and has made a submission as part of the aforementioned Central Bank consultation process. It will continue to engage on this issue to further improve the level of information provided to policyholders.

Tracker Mortgage Examination

192. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Finance if all lenders are on course to meet their commitments made under the tracker mortgage examination in terms of providing redress and compensation by set dates. [13658/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Tracker Examination continues to be a priority for the Central Bank and the Bank will continue to challenge lenders in respect of the conduct of the Examination. The Bank has advised that lenders have committed to certain schedules for payment of redress and compensation to customers and that they are on course to meet these commitments. The Bank has also advised that it will remain vigilant in ensuring that payments to customers are progressed at pace.

The Central Bank issued a report on progress made by lenders in December 2017 and I look

forward to receiving a further progress report on the basis of end-March 2018 data.

Tax Reliefs Abolition

193. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to undertake a comprehensive review of all corporate tax reliefs and expenditures to establish if such tax reliefs benefit the public and society or are simply providing a mechanism for extensive tax avoidance and private corporate profit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13629/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The Irish corporation tax regime contains a small number of specifically targeted tax reliefs. The focus of these reliefs is on the creation of additional employment, as is consistent with current government policy, and on innovation, with a view to generating high value-added economic activity in the country.

Some other countries have a high headline rate of corporation tax which is then supplemented by a high number of tax reliefs which reduce the overall rate of tax paid. By contrast, the approach in Ireland is transparent: we have a competitive headline rate of corporation tax which is applied to a broad base.

The effective tax rate of companies in 2015 was provisionally calculated by the Revenue Commissioners as 9.8%, representing a marginal increase on the 2014 rate of 9.7%. In 2012 and 2013, the effective rate was 10.1%. I would note that while these percentages are lower than the 12.5% headline rate, this can be attributed to the availability of the small number of targeted measures, such as the R&D tax credit, available in Ireland which may lower the effective rate of corporation tax paid.

The issue of tax avoidance has been at forefront of the international tax agenda in recent years. The agreement of the OECD BEPS reports in late 2015 represented a landmark achievement in agreeing comprehensive reform of the international tax system. Ireland has taken a number of steps towards implementing the BEPS recommendations and the Coffey Review sets out a roadmap for Ireland to follow in bringing certainty to the implementation of the remaining recommendations, beginning with the launch of a consultation process which is now underway.

In keeping with our commitment to transparency, Ireland was among the first countries to implement Country by Country Reporting. These reports will be exchanged with all relevant countries to ensure tax authorities have a clear picture of the activities of large multinationals and can assess any risk that the correct tax has not been paid in the correct place.

Ireland was also among the first countries to sign the OECD BEPS multilateral instrument (MLI) in June last year. This MLI will provide the mechanism for extensive changes to tax treaties globally. It will ensure that tax treaties are updated to reflect a number of important OECD BEPS recommendations, including agreed standards on treaty shopping and dispute resolution. The first steps towards ratification were made in Finance Bill 2017.

Question No. 194 answered with Question No. 114.

Tax Credits

195. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Finance the reason persons' (details supplied) tax credits were reduced from €36,000 to €27,500; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14124/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I am advised by Revenue that in the absence of specific information on the taxpayers concerned it is not possible to comment on the case mentioned. However, if the taxpayers wish to contact their local Revenue office then officials would be happy to assist them.

In general the income tax treatment of persons aged 65 and over is as follows:

- An additional age tax credit is available. For single individuals the credit is €245 per year and for a couple who are married or in a civil partnership the credit is €490.

- In addition to the age tax credit, individuals over the age of 65 are exempt from any tax where their income is below a threshold of €18,000 for a single individual or €36,000 for a jointly assessed couple. If the couple have children that are under 18, over 18 and in full-time education or incapacitated, the exemption limits are increased by €575 per child for the first two children and €830 per child for any additional children. However, this exemption threshold is reduced by the amount of any income that is not subject to PAYE. This reduction includes any pension payments made by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. This is to ensure that the taxpayer pays the correct amount of tax based on their total income consisting of both PAYE and non-PAYE income.

- Where a taxpayer's income exceeds the relevant threshold, tax is calculated in the normal manner on the full amount of income. However, if the taxpayer's income is above the thresholds by a small amount, a further relief, known as "marginal relief" is available. Marginal relief operates by reducing the individual or couple's tax liability for a year of assessment to 40% of the amount by which their income exceeds the threshold. Where the application of marginal relief gives a more favourable tax outcome than the standard tax calculation, Revenue will apply this option.

Further information on the age tax credit and related exemptions can be found on the Revenue website at:

<https://www.revenue.ie/en/life-events-and-personal-circumstances/older-persons/tax-credits-for-older-persons.aspx> .

Insurance Costs

196. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance the timeframe to implement measures to address the escalating costs of business insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14181/18]

197. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance when the cost of insurance working group will finalise a report; his plans to implement measures from the work of the group to deal with the escalating costs of business insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14182/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 196 and 197 together.

The second phase of the Cost of Insurance Working Group project culminated in the publication on January 25th of the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance, following its approval by Government. This new Report makes 15 recommendations with 29 associated actions to be carried out, detailed in an Action Plan contained in the Report with agreed timelines for implementation.

All 29 actions are scheduled to be implemented before the end of 2019, with 26 due for completion this year. The following numbers of actions are due in each respective quarter:

- Q1 2018: 8 actions
- Q2 2018: 7 actions
- Q3 2018: 4 actions
- Q4 2018: 7 actions
- Q1 2019: action
- Q2 2019: 1 action
- Q3 2019: N/A
- Q4 2019: 1 action

The recommendations, covering three main themes, include actions to:

- Increase Transparency: enhance levels of transparency and improve data sharing and collection processes,

- Review the level of damages in personal injury cases: request that the Law Reform Commission undertake a detailed analysis of the possibility of developing constitutionally sound legislation to delimit or cap the amounts of damages which a court may award in respect of some or all categories of personal injuries, and

- Improve the personal injuries litigation framework: through a number of measures, including:

1. ensuring potential defendants are notified in sufficient time that an incident has occurred in relation to which a claim is going to be made against their policy;

2. tackling fraudulent and exaggerated claims; and

3. ensuring suitable training and information supports are available to the Judiciary to assist in the fair and consistent assessment and awarding of damages in personal injury cases.

The Working Group will focus during 2018 on carrying out the recommendations of the Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance in parallel with the continuing implementation of the 2017 Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance. I am hopeful that the cumulative effect of the completion of the two reports' recommendations will be increased stability in the pricing of insurance for businesses and improved availability of liability insurance for all types of bodies.

Mortgage Book Sales

198. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when he was first informed of a bank's (details supplied) planned sale of a loan portfolio; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14115/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I was first informed by Department officials of PTSB's intention to offer this particular portfolio of loans for sale on Friday 19th January. My officials were first briefed on the timing of the sale, and potential composition of

the portfolio, earlier that week.

As this information was commercially sensitive, and as I am obliged to comply with stock exchange disclosure and market abuse rules, I was not in a position to discuss it publicly at the time.

I should emphasise at this stage that no loan has been sold yet and we won't know how many loans will be sold for a number of months. In addition, it is not known to whom the loans will be sold. However, I want and expect PTSB to be transparent with their customers when it comes to this sale process as it evolves.

As I indicated previously, if the transaction proceeds I expect to be formally consulted on the disposal in due course as provided for in the Relationship Framework between the Minister and the bank.

Mortgage Lending

199. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he or his officials have had contact with the Single Supervisory Mechanism on the classification of certain restructured mortgages as non-performing loans on the books of banks; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14116/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In answering the Deputy's question, it is useful if I start by giving some historic context. During the height of the financial crisis a key focus of the authorities was on stabilising and ultimately reducing mortgage arrears through the implementation of sustainable mortgage solutions that were agreed with borrowers.

This led to the Central Bank of Ireland (CBI) introducing public mortgage arrears resolution targets (MART) for the banks in H1 2013. As the MART process was rolled out a split mortgage solution or a part capital and interest solution that met certain criteria were both accepted by the CBI as being sustainable for the purposes of these targets.

Since the establishment of the Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM) in November 2014, the focus has shifted from reducing mortgage arrears levels to reducing Non-performing Loans (NPLs). This shift in focus has been accompanied by a new strict definition Europe-wide of what constitutes an NPL by the European Banking Authority (EBA) which means that certain restructures are deemed NPL even if customers are meeting the revised payment schedule.

Officials in my Department met with staff of the SSM at the highest level on two occasions since late 2016. In the course of their discussions they outlined the background and history to the restructuring effort in Ireland and questioned the logic of now classifying some types of restructured loans, including certain split mortgages, as NPL indefinitely.

While my Department has been informed that the SSM is looking into the regulatory treatment of split mortgages across a number of European member states I have no evidence at this point that this categorisation is going to change.

Aside from direct interaction with the SSM, Department officials have also been actively involved in the discussions on NPLs through its involvement in the European Council's Financial Services Committee subgroup on NPLs, and the more recent European Commission Expert Group on NPLs. While this has ensured that Ireland's views are voiced and considered on the matter, ultimately the final arbiter on the resolution of NPLs for the Irish banks is the SSM.

Economic Policy

200. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he continues to have discussions with his counterparts at EU level with a view to preventing an economic crash in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14231/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As Minister for Finance, I attend the Economic and Financial Affairs Council of the European Union (ECOFIN) which is responsible for EU policy in areas including economic policy. I also attend meetings of the Eurogroup, where the ministers of the euro area member states discuss matters concerning their shared responsibilities related to the euro. The Eurogroup's main task is to ensure close coordination of economic policies among the euro area member states and to promote conditions for stronger economic growth.

At both the ECOFIN and Eurogroup meetings, Ministers of the Member States work alongside the European Commission and the European Central Bank (ECB) to take stock of the latest economic situation in the EU and euro area, including on the risks to the European economy's growth prospects.

The European Semester was initiated in response to the crisis in 2010. It provides a framework for coordination of economic policies across the European Union in which guidance is provided to Member States before they take policy decisions at national level. The guidance is provided in the context of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) and the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure (MIP). As part of the Semester process, the Commission makes country-specific recommendations to provide tailored policy guidance to each EU country on how to boost jobs and growth, while maintaining sound public finances. Following the economic crisis, budgetary surveillance was enhanced with the 'Six-Pack' and 'Two-Pack' regulations which seek to complement the European Semester through enhanced monitoring and surveillance of the fiscal policies of EU Member States.

The European economy is performing well with growth exceeding expectations in 2017. The latest estimates from Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, show that in 2017 the EU and euro area economies grew by 2.4 per cent and 2.3 per cent respectively. The upturn is increasingly broad-based across EU countries. The recovery has been supported by a number of factors including sound macroeconomic policies, strong business and consumer confidence and a gradual improvement in world trade.

The European Commission's Autumn Economic Forecast 2017 highlights risks to the European economy as being broadly balanced. Downside risks relate to the process of the UK leaving the EU, global geopolitical instability and potentially tighter global financial conditions. While bank fragilities in the euro area have eased, low profitability and legacy issues (i.e. non-performing loans) remain a concern. Other economic challenges relate to potential changes to the international taxation and trading environments. On the upside, uncertainties have diminished, economic sentiment has improved and with the rebound outside Europe potentially leading to a stronger, more durable expansion in Europe.

Given the still high levels of unemployment and public and private debt across the EU, there are clearly no grounds for complacency. An appropriate balance of fiscal, monetary and structural reform policies are needed to ensure sustainable growth is maintained in Europe.

Credit Availability

201. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which adequate working capital remains available to small and medium-sized enterprises with particular reference to the need to ensure the protection of jobs in the indigenous sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14232/18]

208. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he remains satisfied that the main banks are making adequate resources available to facilitate the house building programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14239/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 201 and 208 together.

Supporting the availability of finance for SMEs is a cornerstone element of Government policy in our efforts to strengthen the economy and create jobs. Government is focused on ensuring that all viable SMEs have access to an appropriate supply of credit from a diverse range of bank and non-bank sources. In this regard the Government has developed a number of initiatives to ensure that the supply of credit in the market is sufficient to meet the existing and future funding needs of SMEs.

In terms of monitoring the working capital and other requirements for SMEs, my Department biannually surveys the demand for credit by SMEs. I would draw the Deputy's attention to the Department of Finance SME Credit Demand Survey just published, covering the period April to September 2017, which can be found at www.finance.gov.ie.

The results of this survey show that, when pending applications are excluded, 88% of credit applications to banks were approved or partially approved. Working capital/cash flow requirements are provided as the main reason for applying for bank finance with 38% stating this is why they requested bank finance. When asked about sources of finance for working capital, internal funds/retained earnings were the main finance source of working capital with 81% of working capital coming from this source (up 8%) since Sept. '16.

Also, the latest publication of the Central Bank's Trends in Business Credits and Deposits which can be accessed at

<https://www.centralbank.ie/statistics/data-and-analysis/credit-and-banking-statistics/business-credit-and-deposits> recorded an increase in new lending to the construction sector.

Further, AIB has stated that construction, "is of strategic importance for the economy and the bank. AIB is strongly supportive of the industry and we are ready and willing to increase our support as the industry grows. We are the main bank to many of the largest developers but also we have a strong focus on mid-sized developers. We created a new dedicated team in 2017 to serve mid-sized development groups following feedback from the industry that they struggled to get the attention of mainstream banks. Overall we have more than doubled the Bank's Development Lending Team over the last twelve months".

The Government remains committed to the SME sector and larger businesses which it sees as a key engine of ongoing economic growth. I can assure the Deputy that my Department, working with other relevant Departments, Bodies and Agencies, will continue to advance policies to ensure the availability of both bank and non-bank credit so as to ensure that viable Irish business have sufficient access to finance.

Motor Insurance Costs

202. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance when the benefits of the review of the motor insurance sector will accrue in terms of reduced premiums; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14233/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As you are aware, the Cost of Insurance Working Group published its Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance on 10 January 2017. The Report makes 33 recommendations with 71 associated actions to be carried out in agreed timeframes, set out in an Action Plan within the Report.

Work is ongoing on the implementation of the recommendations by the relevant Government Departments and Agencies and there is a commitment within the Report that the Working Group will prepare quarterly updates on its progress. The fourth such update was published on 20 February last and shows that of the 46 separate deadlines set during 2017 within the Action Plan, 39 have been met. Substantial work has also been undertaken in respect of the nine action points categorised as “ongoing”.

I believe that the continued implementation of the recommendations from the Report on the Cost of Motor Insurance, in parallel with the implementation of the recommendations from the recently published Report on the Cost of Employer and Public Liability Insurance, will make a difference to the pricing of insurance premiums over the next 12-18 months. It is envisaged that the implementation of all the recommendations from the two Reports cumulatively, with the appropriate levels of commitment and cooperation from all relevant stakeholders, will achieve the objective of delivering fairer premiums for consumers and businesses alike.

In this regard, it should be noted that the most recent CSO data (for February 2018) indicates that private motor insurance premiums have decreased by 18.1% since peaking in July 2016. While the CSO statistics indicate a greater degree of stability on an overall basis, these figures represent a broad average and therefore there are many people who may still be seeing increases. However, I am hopeful that this greater stability in pricing will be maintained with the result that premiums should continue to fall from the very high levels of mid-2016.

Economic Growth Rate

203. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the degree to which he expects the economy to grow in the context of this and subsequent years, notwithstanding the potential threat of Brexit or other external factors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14234/18]

209. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he expects his economic projections to remain on target throughout the course of 2018; if particular issues have emerged or are likely to emerge in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14240/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 203 and 209 together.

Recent economic indicators have generally been positive, indicating that the recovery is continuing in a sustainable manner.

Modified domestic demand, which adjusts for distortions in the Irish economy, is up 4.0 per cent in 2017. Growth is broad based with net exports also contributing positively to growth last year.

The strength of domestic demand is being felt in the labour market. Employment growth remains strong with an annual rate of 2.9 per cent recorded in 2017, representing the creation of over 61,000 additional jobs.

Data published in the first quarter of this year indicate that:

- Expansion in the manufacturing and services sectors continued in February with the Purchasing Managers' Index for the sectors recording their fifty seventh and sixty seventh successive month of expansion, respectively.

- The Consumer Sentiment Index was 105.2 in February, well above its long run average.

- The seasonally adjusted monthly unemployment rate for February was 6.1 per cent, down from 7.2 per cent in February 2017. As a result, the unemployment rate has fallen by almost two thirds since its peak of 16 per cent in early-2012.

As part of Budget 2018, my Department forecast real GDP growth of 3.5 per cent this year. The labour market should benefit from this, with employment growth of 2.3 per cent (48,000 jobs) expected this year. Strong employment growth is set to further reduce the unemployment rate, to around 5 ½ per cent by the end of this year.

However, there are a number of risks at present including the UK's decision to exit the EU. In addition, the sharp appreciation of the euro-sterling rate over the last two years is posing significant challenges, particularly for the traditional sector, the tourism sector and areas sensitive to cross-border trade.

My Department has incorporated the estimated impact of a "hard" Brexit into the macro-economic forecasts published as part of Budget 2018. This shock is projected to reduce GDP growth by approximately ¾ of a percentage point on average per annum over the 2019-2021 period. These forecasts were endorsed by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council (IFAC). The Department will publish updated forecasts as part of the April 2018 Stability Programme Update.

These projections were informed by Department of Finance – ESRI joint research which modelled the medium to long term impact of Brexit on Ireland. In particular, the forecasts were guided by the "WTO scenario", whereby the UK and EU do not conclude a bilateral trade agreement and instead the UK exercises its rights under the Most Favored Nation (MFN) clause of the WTO.

The best way to mitigate risks such as Brexit is to improve the resilience of the economy. The Government will play its part by continuing to implement competitiveness oriented policies – including those that address emerging bottlenecks – and ensuring that the public finances continue to be managed in a prudent fashion.

Brexit Issues

204. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the extent to which he continues to make provision for issues arising from Brexit in such a way as to maximise opportunities for the economy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14235/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department has been to the fore in producing and funding a number of Brexit-related studies, both before and since the UK's referendum decision, to assess and prepare for the impact of a UK exit from the European Union. All of these Brexit-related studies are available on my Department's website. In addi-

tion, regular updates of my Department's Macro-Economic forecasts take account of the impact of Brexit.

While the results in the 'Modelling the Medium to Long Term Potential Macroeconomic Impact of Brexit on Ireland' study published by my Department and the ESRI, show that the potential impact of Brexit on the Irish economy will be significant under all scenarios, with output below what it otherwise would have been in a no Brexit scenario, it is important to note that the economy will continue to grow, albeit at a slower pace than it otherwise would have. It should also be noted that these results are based on a "no policy change basis". However, with the future trade path between the UK and EU still unknown, it is crucially important that we prepare our economy for the challenges ahead.

Indeed, as we cannot control the international environment, the best way and most immediate policy under the Government's control to counter the likely negative economic impacts of Brexit is to prudently manage the public finances in order to ensure that Ireland's economy continues to remain competitive in the face of future economic headwinds. In this context, the Government has taken a number of important steps to maximise opportunities for the economy and to prepare our economy for the challenges of Brexit, including in Budgets 2017 and 2018, the Action Plan for Jobs, the Ireland Connected trade and investment strategy, and the preparation of a new 10-year Capital Plan.

As discussions on the future relationship between the UK and the EU progress, my Department will continue to monitor the economic impacts of Brexit, including carrying out relevant analysis to make provision for issues arising from Brexit, and contingency plan for the future challenges ahead.

Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears

205. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the degree to which he and his Department continue to monitor the policy of lending institutions that are set to repossess family homes, even in instances in which the borrower has over the past number of years continued to make repayments to the extent of up to one third of income; if a protocol can be devised to facilitate such borrowers (details supplied); if the lenders will now be expected to accept some responsibility in the issue by way of extending the terms of the mortgages or splitting such mortgages in a way to make it possible for the borrower to meet the demand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14236/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, within the remit of the Central Bank of Ireland's responsibilities for safeguarding stability and protecting consumers; its approach to mortgage arrears resolution is focused on ensuring the fair treatment of borrowers through a strong consumer protection framework and ensuring that lenders have appropriate arrears resolution strategies and operations.

The Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) forms part of the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Framework. It is a statutory Code first introduced by the Central Bank in February 2009, replacing the existing voluntary Code of Practice on Mortgage Arrears issued by the Irish Banking Federation. The CCMA has been revised three times since 2009, with the current CCMA becoming effective from 1 July 2013. The CCMA provides a strong consumer protection framework to ensure that borrowers in financial difficulty are treated in a timely, transparent and fair manner by regulated entities.

Firstly can I highlight to the Deputy that the CCMA includes timelines for regulated entities

before they can commence legal proceedings for repossession of a primary residence.

It also includes requirements that repayment arrangements be sustainable and based on a full assessment of the individual circumstances of the borrower and that repossession be used only as a last resort. Borrowers who engage, therefore, benefit from the protections afforded under the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Process (MARP), enhancing their chances of remaining in their homes. The MARP process is a four-step process that regulated entities must follow and must consider the most suitable arrangement from the suite of options they offer. Each regulated entity must consider the borrower's situation in the context of the range of solutions it offers, which may differ from lender to lender. The CCMA does not prescribe the solution which must be offered and this remains a commercial decision for the lender (outside of a Court process such as insolvency). The Central Bank has published guidance for supervisors on what constitutes sustainable mortgage arrears solutions.

At the end of the MARP, regulated entities are required to provide a three-month notice period to allow co-operating borrowers time to consider their options, such as voluntary surrender or an arrangement under the Personal Insolvency Act, before legal action can commence. Regarding potential court proceedings for repossession, under the CCMA, a regulated entity may only commence legal proceedings for repossession of a primary residence where it has made every reasonable effort to agree an alternative repayment arrangement (ARA) with the borrower and other clear requirements are met. This framework requires lenders to exhaust the options available from the suite of ARAs offered before taking action which may result in the borrower losing their home (whether by voluntary sale or repossession).

During the legal process, borrowers have opportunities to re-engage with lenders to find a solution. In some circumstances, however, loss of ownership may be unavoidable.

As I mentioned at the outset, a key element of the Central Bank's role is ensuring that the consumer protection regulatory framework is fit for purpose so that consumers best interests are protected. To this end, I have also asked the Central Bank to carry out a review of the CCMA to ensure it remains as effective as possible and for the review to be completed as soon as possible.

Finally, in June 2016, I requested the Governor of the Central Bank to provide me with a report detailing the mortgage restructuring activity within banks and non-banks, the range of solutions offered by non-banks, assessing the range of solutions that may affect borrowers' capacity to remain in their primary residences, and whether these are addressing the requirements of over-indebted borrowers. In that Report, the Central Bank stated 'While repossession proceedings should only be initiated following the MARP, the ability to undertake secured lending is ultimately dependent on the institution's right to realise the security if needed and to price accordingly. This is a cornerstone of secured lending and, by extension, an effectively functioning mortgage market'.

The Central Bank further stated that 'Overall, there is strong evidence that banks and non-banks are looking to exhaust available options before moving into the legal process'.

Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears

206. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to introduce statutory rules appertaining to the code of conduct applicable to primary and secondary lenders or their agents with a view to ensuring the protection of families who continue to pay their mortgage to the best of their ability, or those who can demonstrate an ability to so do, and the need to ensure that the current housing crisis is not further exacerbated by the activities of venture

capitalists with negative consequences of a social and economic nature; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14237/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, within the remit of the Central Bank's responsibilities for safeguarding stability and protecting consumers, its approach to mortgage arrears resolution is focused on ensuring the fair treatment of borrowers through a strong consumer protection framework and ensuring that lenders have appropriate arrears resolution strategies and operations in place.

The Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA) forms part of the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Framework. It is a statutory Code, issued under Section 117 of the Central Bank Act, 1989.

The CCMA is a lengthy document which has evolved to reflect the changing times and situations which have arisen in the area of consumer protection. For example, an Addendum to the CCMA was published to take account of the Consumer Protection (Regulation of Credit Servicing Firms) Act 2015 which stated that with effect from 8 July 2015, credit servicing firms, as defined in the 2015 Act, must apply for authorisation to the Central Bank and that the CCMA 2013 would apply to these firms. The great benefit of the CCMA not being a piece of primary legislation is that it can be amended relatively quickly to respond to changing events, pursuant to Section 117 of the Central Bank Act, 1989, while still remaining statutory.

The CCMA is aimed specifically at the process to be followed by relevant firms, to ensure borrowers in arrears or pre-arrears in respect of a mortgage loan secured on a primary residence are treated in a timely, transparent and fair manner. A key element of the Central Bank's role is ensuring that the consumer protection regulatory framework is fit for purpose so that consumers best interests are protected. To this end, I have also asked the Central Bank to carry out a review of the CCMA to ensure it remains as effective as possible and for the review to be completed as soon as possible.

Job Creation Data

207. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated number of jobs projected to be created within the economy over the next five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14238/18]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): My Department's most recent macro-economic forecasts were published with Budget 2018 in October last year, and cover the period up until 2021. The table sets out the total employment projections from these forecasts.

Overall, it is forecast that approximately 115,000 net additional jobs will be created over the period from 2018 to 2021. For this year, employment growth of 2.3 per cent (approximately 48,000 jobs) is projected. For next year, employment gains of 2.1 per cent (approximately 44,000 jobs) are also anticipated. Over the remaining two years of the forecast horizon to 2021, employment growth of 1.7 per cent on average per annum is projected (equivalent to an average of approximately 36,000 jobs per year).

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Employment (%)	2.3	2.1	1.8	1.6
Employment ('000s)	48	44	38	34

Source: Department of Finance

These forecasts will be updated in the 2018 Stability Programme Update which will be published in April. The updated forecasts will take into account the latest developments, including revisions to the labour market data arising from the new CSO Labour Force Survey.

Question No. 208 answered with Question No. 201.

Question No. 209 answered with Question No. 203.

Question No. 210 answered with Question No. 87.

Flood Relief Schemes

211. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he is satisfied that due regard has been given to the economic effect of works in a populated area of significant economic, heritage and tourism related activity in relation to identifying the proposed OPW flood relief scheme for Cork city as the optimum solution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13579/18]

212. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the OPW plans to further consult with the public following the design change in relation to the proposed OPW flood relief scheme for Cork city, in view of the fact that a city wide groundwater pumping system is now proposed in addition to flood relief walls and levies previously advertised to the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13580/18]

213. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the OPW's assessment of the tidal barrier proposal put forward by a campaign (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13581/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): I propose to take Questions Nos. 211 to 213, inclusive, together.

The Office of Public Works (OPW) has developed the proposed flood relief scheme for Cork City and upstream to Inniscarra Dam following 11 years of detailed scientific and engineering study and design which has been carried out with the benefit of ongoing and regular public consultation with the general public and other key stakeholders. The need for the project is beyond question as the City in particular suffers from regular flooding from both fluvial and tidal flood events with particularly severe events affecting the City in 2009, 2014 and the winter of 2015/16. The scheme has been brought through the formal Public Exhibition or statutory consultation process as required under the Arterial Drainage Acts and detailed reports were put into the public domain at the completion of that phase of the project in December 2017. These reports (see www.lowerleefrs.ie) deal comprehensively with the issues raised during the above consultative process and set out categorically how the proposed scheme is the only viable solution to the flooding problem in the city.

Among the detailed reports completed during the Exhibition stage is one dealing with the option of constructing a tidal barrier. The proposal of a tidal barrier put forward by others was considered in depth and is found to be unworkable for cost, navigational and environmental reasons as well as lacking upstream storage capacity in the likely future climate change scenario. It is, however, technically possible to construct a barrier elsewhere, at either side of Great Island, but the estimated whole life cost of this of up to €1.7 billion also makes it a non-viable option. In light of the in-depth analysis on the tidal barrier option for Cork carried out

by international experts, the position is that a tidal barrier is not a viable solution for Cork and cannot be considered further.

Like other similar projects, the scheme for Cork City as exhibited includes a drainage system to cater for both surface water drainage and groundwater behind the flood defences. The pumping element will only be required to operate during periods of extremely high river levels, for short durations around high tide. For the majority of the time, the gravity drainage system will operate as at present and the normal groundwater regime will not be altered. Detailed design is currently ongoing to finalise the finer detail of the drainage system, but what is proposed does not differ in principle from the scheme exhibited. The published Exhibition Reports deal with the groundwater aspects of the scheme.

During the development of the scheme, the OPW and its partners, Cork City and County Councils, were acutely conscious of the need to avoid disruption to the city during construction works. So while there will be some disruption during construction, it will be minimised by careful phasing of the works, traffic management including noise and dust management. Works will also be co-ordinated in conjunction with Cork City Council to mitigate the overall duration of any disruption. It is OPW's view that the permanent economic benefits of the scheme in protecting businesses and attracting new business to the city will significantly exceed any short-term economic impacts arising during the construction phase.

Public Sector Pensions

214. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of pensions for retired public servants (details supplied). [13531/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to my answer to Parliamentary Question No. 194 of 27 February 2018.

Public Sector Reform Implementation

215. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which he has quantified the likely contribution of reform in the public sector in the context of economic performance in the coming years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13535/18]

216. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which each Department remains committed to using reform to achieve economic benefit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13536/18]

220. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if particular Departments or public offices or bodies under their aegis require reforming procedures with a view to increasing efficiency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13540/18]

223. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which he is satisfied that reforms to date will continue to benefit the economy in the future; the reforms which have become outdated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13543/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 215, 216, 220 and 223 together.

The public service is central to economic and social life in Ireland. Significant reforms have been made in recent years and have made the work of the public service more transparent, decision-making more accountable and service delivery more effective and efficient.

Our Public Service 2020, which I launched last December, is a new policy framework designed to build on these previous reforms while expanding the scope of reform to focus more on collaboration, innovation and evaluation. I am confident that Our Public Service 2020 will contribute to the strengthening and further development of our economy over the period of its implementation.

Our Public Service 2020 is a whole-of-public-service initiative. A Public Service Leadership Board comprising Secretary General and CEO level participants from across the civil and public service has been established to drive the reform agenda and lead on its implementation. This approach will support and enable public servants and their organisations to perform at their best and to work together to deliver high-quality, value-for-money outcomes that will benefit the economy.

As Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform I must ensure that our fiscal and public expenditure policy is prudent and sustainable. There are a number of budgetary reforms introduced in recent years to guide my decisions on overall fiscal policy in this regard, including fiscal rules, expenditure ceilings and spending reviews. The actions in Our Public Service 2020 will ensure that the focus of the public service is very much on delivery of quality public services, while operating within these prudent limits.

Our Public Service 2020 contains an added focus on evaluation and on the importance of building a reform evaluation culture. The newly established Reform Evaluation Unit will work closely with units within my Department focused on performance budgeting and spending reviews to strengthen the links between expenditure and reform. This will take place alongside the work of the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) which leads a programme of evaluation of public service delivery across the public service. A series of rolling, selective reviews, which will cover the totality of Government spending over a three-year period to 2019, started in 2017.

Public Sector Reform Implementation

217. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which reforms embraced by public administration in recent years compare with reforms introduced in other competing EU or non-EU jurisdictions, with particular reference to enhancing this country's opportunities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13537/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): In 2017, the OECD were commissioned by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to undertake a written evaluation of the Public Service Reform Plan 2014-16, with a view to informing future public service reform efforts. This assessment, which was published in July 2017, focused on whether the plan met its objectives; provided clear recommendations for the future direction of public service reform in Ireland; and considered and compared approaches in other OECD States.

The OECD assessment noted that the plan succeeded in completing the majority of the activities it set out to do and that the plan succeeded in creating a public-service wide approach to reform. It particularly highlighted the significance of the plan in both creating an impetus for

reform and identifying actions within each public service body to support the plan. Key learnings from the OECD assessment informed the development of Our Public Service 2020, a new framework for development and innovation in the public service to 2020 and beyond, which I launched last December.

In addition to the positive report from the OECD, a recent report by the Institute of Public Administration (Public Sector Trends 2017) includes many positive findings on the development and progress of our public services across the EU28. This review which draws on data from the World Bank, the IMF and the OECD amongst other sources, found that:

- Ireland's Public Administration comes first in the EU28 for being the most professional and least politicised.

- Ireland comes 6th in the EU28 for the quality of its public administration (a relatively consistent score over last three years).

- Ireland is 5th in the EU28 in the rating of perceptions that Government decisions are effectively implemented.

Both the OECD assessment of the Public Service Reform Plan 2014-16, and the IPA Public Sector Trends report demonstrate that Ireland's public services continue to perform well on an international stage and that there is a solid basis for continuous improvement and development of our public services.

Public Sector Pay

218. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the further reforms that may be introduced regarding the manner in which public contracts or procurements are undertaken with a view to identifying the most cost effective and expeditious procedures, thereby eliminating costly delays; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13538/18]

219. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the extent to which further reforms are required in respect of the awarding of public contracts or procurements with a view to ensuring that business in this country can be undertaken in a way that is competitive with all other European countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13539/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I propose to take Questions Nos. 218 and 219 together.

Procurement is a key element of the Government's Public Service Reform agenda and is a very significant portion of overall spending. The State buys everything from pens and paper, through to naval vessels and surgical equipment. In this context, it is essential that the Public Service operates in a co-ordinated and efficient way and delivers much needed public services in a sustainable manner. That is why the Government established the Office of Government Procurement (OGP).

The OGP commenced operations in 2014 and, together with four key sectors (Health, Defence, Education and Local Government), has responsibility for sourcing goods and services on behalf of the Public Service. In addition, the OGP also has responsibility for procurement policy and offers advice on procurement procedures.

The OGP has progressed the National Public Procurement Policy Framework which enables a more consistent approach to public procurement across the public sector by setting out the procurement procedures to be followed by public bodies. Last July, my colleague, Minister of State Patrick O'Donovan, launched new Public Procurement Guidelines for Goods and Services. This comprehensive interpretation of the public procurement directives has been designed to improve consistency and promote best practice in the application of the public procurement rules. In addition, the OGP maintains a proactive line of communication with SME stakeholders to ensure they are informed of policy developments and that these are communicated by them to their members.

The OGP together with four key sectors, speaks with "one voice" for the public service to the market for each category of expenditure, eliminating duplication and taking advantage of the scale of public procurement to best effect. This move is in line with best practice in the public and private sector and is part of the continuing reform programme being driven by my Department.

The Government has committed in the Programme for Partnership Government to examining the new procurement structures in place and where necessary make adjustments according to best international practice and in conjunction with Irish business.

Question No. 220 answered with Question No. 215.

Public Sector Pay

221. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform when the restoration of the various payments conceded under FEMPI will take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13541/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy is aware the unwinding of the emergency FEMPI legislation commenced with the Lansdowne Road Agreement 2016-2018 and will be completed under the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018 -2020.

The Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 sets out a specific schedule of measures and dates in respect of deductions made under the FEMPI Acts including provisions in respect of the implementation of the Public Service Stability Agreement 2018-2020 (PSSA), the introduction of the Additional Superannuation Contribution (ASC) for public servants, elimination of Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR) and a process of engagement in respect of contractor fees.

The Act gives effect to the pay measures of the PSSA 2018-2020, which provide further pay restoration (that is, in addition to that restoration under the Lansdowne Road Agreement/FEMPI Act 2015). In 2019 the Pension Related Deduction (PRD) will be converted to an Additional Superannuation Contribution (ASC) for public servants.

Unwinding of the PSPR is taking place under FEMPI 2015, with PSPR-affected pensioners getting pension increases via substantial restoration of the PSPR cuts on 1 January 2016, 1 January 2017 and 1 January 2018.

The Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017, provides for further significant lessening of the impact of PSPR by way of threshold and rate changes to apply on 1 January 2019 and 1 January 2020. When fully in place from the beginning of 2020, these changes will mean that the vast majority of public service retirees, comprising everyone with occupational pension

values up to at least €54,000, will be entirely free of PSPR.

The 2017 Act also provides an alternative statutory basis for the setting and varying of fees for contractors currently subject to the FEMPI legislation. In future the relevant Government Minister, operating with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform will have the statutory power to set and vary the fees paid to contractors for goods and services based on a range of considerations, including affordability and value for money.

Capital Expenditure Programme

222. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if, in the context of the preview of the capital programme, he has identified specific issues requiring particular investment to address infrastructural deficits in either road and rail transport, communications or other sectors; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13542/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): The recent review of the capital plan, *Building on Recovery: Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2016–2021*, was published in September 2017. This review:

- confirmed the compelling case for increased public capital investment to strengthen Ireland's public capital infrastructure and build the resilience of the economy in terms of significant risks such as Brexit;

- emphasised the need in the context of the implementation of the National Development Plan to closely monitor and manage potential overheating risks and to continue to build the economy's supply capacity and competitiveness;

- highlighted the requirement to increase the efficiency and value-for-money of public capital investment to make best use of scarce Exchequer resources in light of competing needs; and

- stressed the societal transformation required to transition to Ireland's climate change objectives.

The Infrastructure Demand and Capacity Analysis undertaken by the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service as part of the review of the 2015 capital plan identified the priority areas listed below for future public capital investment:

- Transport: maintenance and upgrading of the road network and public transport to protect asset quality and value, meet demand forecast, ease congestion and to meet climate action objectives.

- Education: higher education and the schools building programme.

- Health: subject to further analysis of the totality of health capacity and infrastructure.

- Housing: on the basis of the review of the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

This analysis informed the investment decisions outlined in the recently published National Development Plan. Identified specific issues requiring particular investment to address infrastructural deficits in, for example, road and rail transport, communications or other vital sectors are outlined in detail in Chapter 5 of the National Development Plan.

Question No. 223 answered with Question No. 215.

Brexit Issues

224. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the degree to which his Department monitors the impact of Brexit on the public and private sectors with a view to addressing such issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13544/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, a whole of Government approach is being adopted to addressing the impacts of Brexit. Detailed work is taking place across Departments and in State agencies to prepare for the UK's exit from the EU. This includes contingency planning for all Brexit scenarios; engagement with stakeholders; support to companies from the enterprise agencies; and work to exploit any opportunities that arise from Brexit.

Within my own Department a dedicated Brexit/EU/North South Unit is responsible for co-ordinating the response to Brexit across the Department and it plays a full role in the cross-Department structures that support the work of Government. Brexit issues are also addressed by staff in relevant areas across the Department.

The risks arising from Brexit are reflected in the Government's National Risk Assessment, which identifies areas where Brexit poses a specific risk, particularly in relation to the economy. This approach is reflected in my own Department's Statement of Strategy for 2016-2019 and also in its Risk Register.

Policy decisions in support of the Government's approach to Brexit arise across a wide range of areas, including the annual budgetary process; the new 10-year National Development Plan; the Action Plan for Jobs; the Trade and Investment Strategy; the review of the Enterprise 2025 policy; and sectoral policies and investment decisions in areas such as agriculture, enterprise, transport, communications and energy.

Drainage Schemes

225. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the OPW will carry out works at a location (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13578/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): The Office of Public Works (OPW) carries out a programme of Arterial Drainage Maintenance to a total of 11,500 km of river channel and approximately 730 km of embankments. These maintenance works relate to arterial drainage schemes completed by the OPW under the Arterial Drainage Acts 1945 and 1995. The OPW is required to maintain these designated drainage schemes in proper repair and effective condition.

As the area referred to by the Deputy is part of the OPW arterial drainage scheme, the OPW will carry out a thorough inspection of the embankment referred to by the Deputy and pending the outcome of this inspection, will schedule the necessary maintenance works within available resources.

Public Sector Pensions

226. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform

if a Civil Service pension award is clarified on reaching pension age; if the terms of contract remain available to indicate entitlement for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13618/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Based on the information provided, the person concerned availed of a marriage gratuity in respect her service when she retired in 1979. In accordance with the terms and conditions of the payment of marriage gratuities, acceptance of a marriage gratuity is in lieu of any superannuation entitlements arising from such service. Therefore, there is no entitlement to an occupational pension from the Civil Service for the period of her service.

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

227. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if an organisation (details supplied) has requested a meeting with him; when this meeting was initially requested; when it is planned to meet with the organisation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13684/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): Formal arrangements to meet in relation to the matter concerned are the subject of deliberation between the parties and remain to be finalised.

Public Sector Staff

228. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the public service redevelopment scheme is widely used by the public and Civil Service; the activity of the scheme for 2017; if staff that commenced employment at Shannon Development, Shannon, County Clare and are now employed by Shannon Commercial Properties and wish to be considered for this scheme will be provided every opportunity to obtain employment in the public service; if there is a timeframe to redeploy this particular cohort of staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13733/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): As the Deputy will be aware, the Public Service Agreements (PSAs) provide for agreed redeployment arrangements to apply in the civil service and in other parts of the public service. Redeployment is primarily a mechanism for the transfer of surplus staff to areas where appropriate vacancies exist.

My Department is responsible for redeployment in the civil service and non-commercial state bodies and these redeployments panels are operated by the Public Appointments Service (PAS).

I understand from PAS that in 2017 there were 33 redeployment through the civil service redeployment panel and this would have included 8 staff from Shannon Commercial Properties to the Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

I also understand that there are currently 5 staff from Shannon Commercial Properties on the civil service redeployment panel. It is the position that they can only be redeployed when suitable vacancies become available.

Community Employment Schemes Supervisors

229. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the progress on his discussions with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in relation to the implementation of Labour Court recommendation, LRC 19293, concerning the rights of community employment scheme supervisors in view of commitments made by his predecessor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13999/18]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Parliamentary Question no. 54985/17 answered on 16 January 2018.

Flood Relief Schemes Status

230. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the works which have been completed on the Clare river flood relief scheme, encompassing, Claregalway, Carnmore, Lisheenavalla and Caherlea; the flood alleviation works outstanding in the area; when these works will be completed in their entirety; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14069/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): Flood relief works on the Clare River (Claregalway) Flood Relief Scheme, which commenced in June 2016, are being carried out by the Office of Public Works (OPW). The works programme is scheduled for completion by Q3 2019. In recognition of a severe flooding event in the area in 2009, interim flood relief works were completed at Claregalway Bridge and Crushenny in 2012.

The following is a summary of the current position in relation to the Clare River Flood Relief Scheme:

Claregalway;

Channel and bank protection works upstream of Claregalway Bridge have been completed.

Lakeview:

Construction of the Lakeview drainage pipeline has been completed. Final reinstatement of agricultural land along the route of the pipeline is completed with minor reinstatement required in lands adjacent to Claregalway village. This work is scheduled for Q2 this year.

Kiniska:

Channel maintenance, bank protection and bridge upgrade works on the Kiniska (Cin Uisce) tributary have been completed. Reinstatement of agricultural land is substantially complete.

Montiagh South

Road raising, drainage and bridge works of Montiagh South road network have been completed. Minor accommodation works in this area are being completed.

Caherlea/Lisheenavalla:

Works in the Caherlea/Lisheenavalla area including channel widening, re-grading, embankment construction and bridge works have been completed. Maintenance, regrading and upsizing of the Islandmore Drain, is due for completion in Q2 2018. Accommodation works and

rehabilitation of land in these areas is due to commence in Q2 2018. The raising the road locally in Caherlea/Lisheenavalla may be undertaken as a future measure if considered necessary.

Montiagh North:

The scheme works in this area are due to commence in Q2 2018.

Carnmore/Cashla:

The scheme works will commence shortly with the establishment of a site compound to facilitate works and installation of bridge culverts across the R339 road network. Works on the construction of a 1.9km flood alleviation pipeline in Carnmore/Cashla are scheduled to commence in Q2 2018.

Information and a monthly progress report on the scheme is available on the OPW website.

<https://www.opw.ie/en/flood-risk-management/operations/flooddefenceschemes/clareriver-claregalwayfloodreliefscheme/>

Office of Public Works Properties

231. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if the OPW plans to carry out works to protect the structure and improve the safety of a house (details supplied) in County Louth; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14241/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran): I have been advised by the Commissioners of Public Works that they have been in discussion with Louth County Council in relation to the condition of Westgate House. The Council has agreed to redecorate the façade of the building.

The future use of the property is currently being considered in line with OPW stated policy and, upon completion of this review, the issue of the restoration of the building will be addressed.

Further Education and Training Programmes

232. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department will be prioritising adults with low skills and qualification in the FET (details supplied); if so, if adequate resources will be allocated to do this; if full resources will be available to implement the upskilling pathways action plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13813/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): To support the skills need of those in employment a commitment has been included in the 2018 Action Plan for Education to publish a policy framework for the Further Education and Training (FET) sector on Employee Development. The framework will set out priorities, including how the FET budget will support employee development. The framework will be published in Quarter 3 this year and implementation is scheduled to commence in Quarter 4 of this year.

Arising from the EU Council’s decision to adopt the Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults Recommendation, the 2018 Action Plan for Education includes the commitment

to develop an implementation plan on Upskilling Pathways. My Department has been considering the Council Recommendation and is planning implementation. Arrangements have been made to establish an inter-agency steering group to collaborate on the development of the implementation plan, a report on which will be furnished to the European Commission this year.

Both initiatives will guide the allocation of funding for supporting adults with low skills and qualifications.

Schools Building Projects Status

233. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) for a new school building; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13525/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The major building project referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of architectural planning, Stage 2(b) which includes the application for statutory approvals and the preparation of tender documents. All statutory approvals, including Planning Permission, have been secured.

Lands adjacent to the school site have been purchased from Fingal County Council and a private vendor by the school authority.

The need has arisen for a replacement architect to be appointed on the project. The tender process for a replacement consultant normally takes between 4 and 6 months to complete. The tender documents for the replacement Architect competition are being prepared by the Department. It is expected that the Invitation to Tender for this appointment will issue towards the end of April 2018.

A letter recently issued to the school advising them of the current status of the project.

Apprenticeship Data

234. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of persons enrolled in the commis chef and the chef de partie apprenticeships in 2017 and to date in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13527/18]

235. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the budget allocation for apprenticeships for 2018. [13528/18]

236. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprentices enrolled in apprenticeship programmes. [13529/18]

237. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the apprenticeship programmes in operation. [13530/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 234 to 237, inclusive, together.

The information requested by the Deputy in relation to apprenticeship programmes in operation is set out on the following tabular statement. There are currently 13,209 people undertaking an apprenticeship in one of these programmes.

The 2018 budget allocation for apprenticeship training is €122m which represents an in-

crease of almost 24% on the 2017 allocation of €98.7m.

The number apprentices registered on the Commis Chef Apprenticeships in 2017 was 25 with a further 34 apprentices registered to date in 2018. The Chef de Partie Apprenticeship is currently in development and is scheduled to commence in September 2018 with initial numbers estimated at 48 participants this year.

Current Apprenticeships

	Apprenticeship	NFQ Level	Duration	Coordinating Provider	Collaborating Provider(s)	Industry Lead
NO	CON-STRUC-TION					
1	Brick and Stonelaying	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards & Institutes of Technology	
2	Carpentry and Joinery	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards & Institutes of Technology	
3	Painting and Decorating	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards & Institutes of Technology	
4	Plastering	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards & Institutes of Technology	
5	Plumbing	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards & Institutes of Technology	
6	Stonecutting and Stonemasonry	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards	
7	Wood Manufacturing and Finishing	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards & Institutes of Technology	
	ELECTRICAL					
8	Aircraft Mechanics	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards & Institutes of Technology	
9	Electrical	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards & Institutes of Technology	
10	Electrical Instrumentation	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards & Institutes of Technology	
11	Electronic Security Systems	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards & Institutes of Technology	
12	Instrumentation	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards & Institutes of Technology	
13	Refrigeration and Air Conditioning	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards & Institutes of Technology	
	ENGINEERING					

Questions - Written Answers

	Apprenticeship	NFQ Level	Duration	Coordinating Provider	Collaborating Provider(s)	Industry Lead
NO	CON-STRUC-TION					
14	Farriery	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Irish School of Farriery	
15	Industrial Electrical Engineering	Level 7	2 Years	Limerick IT	-	Stryker
16	Industrial Insulation	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards & Institutes of Technology	
17	Manufacturing Engineering	Level 7	3 Years	Galway Mayo IT	Institutes of Technology	Irish Medical Devices Assoc., IBEC
18	Manufacturing Technology	Level 6	2 Years	Galway Mayo IT	Institutes of Technology	Irish Medical Devices Assoc., IBEC
19	Mechanical Automation and Maintenance Fitting	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards & Institutes of Technology	
20	Metal Fabrication	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards & Institutes of Technology	
21	Pipe Fitting	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards & Institutes of Technology	
22	Polymer Processing Technology	Level 7	3 Years	Athlone IT	Institute of Technology Sligo (online element)	Plastics Ireland, IBEC
23	Sheet Metalworking	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards & Institutes of Technology	
24	Toolmaking	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards & Institutes of Technology	
	FINANCE					
25	Accounting Technician	Level 6	2 years	Accounting Technicians Ireland	ETBs: Cavan & Monaghan; City of Dublin; Dublin & Dun Laoghaire; Kildare and Wicklow	Accounting Technicians Ireland
26	Insurance Practice	Level 8	3 Years	IT Sligo	-	Insurance Institute of Ireland
27	International Financial Services Associate	Level 6	2 years	National College of Ireland	-	Financial Services Ireland (FSI)
28	International Financial Services Specialist	Level 8	2 years	National College of Ireland	-	Financial Services Ireland (FSI)
	ICT					

	Apprenticeship	NFQ Level	Duration	Coordinating Provider	Collaborating Provider(s)	Industry Lead
NO	CON-STRUC-TION					
29	ICT Associate Professional Network Engineer	Level 6	2 years	Fastrack to Information Technology (FIT)	Education and Training Boards	FIT
30	ICT Associate Professional Software Developer	Level 6	2 years	Fastrack to Information Technology (FIT)	Education and Training Boards	FIT
	HOSPITALITY					
31	Commis Chef	Level 6	2 years	Kerry ETB	ETBs: Cavan & Monaghan; City of Dublin; Cork, Galway & Roscommon; Limerick & Clare	Irish Hotel Federation (IHF)
	MOTOR					
32	Agricultural Mechanics	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards & Institutes of Technology	
33	Construction Plant Fitting	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards & Institutes of Technology	
34	Heavy Vehicle Mechanics	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards & Institutes of Technology	
35	Motor Mechanics	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards & Institutes of Technology	
36	Vehicle Body Repairs	Level 6	4 Years	SOLAS	Education and Training Boards & Institutes of Technology	

School Accommodation Provision

238. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has identified a need for additional primary school places in the Greystones area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13550/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy may be aware, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed. As with other school planning areas nationwide, the demographic data for the area referred to by the Deputy will be kept under ongoing review by my Department to take account of updated data.

School Enrolments Data

239. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the estimated number of school places in the Greystones area; the number of children due to begin primary school in September 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13551/18]

241. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a short review of demand in the Greystones area for primary school places will be conducted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13553/18]

242. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to a high level of demand for primary school places in the Greystones area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13554/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 239, 241 and 242 together.

My Department has recently contacted all of the primary schools in the Greystones area to review their projected enrolments for September 2018. My Department will continue to liaise with the schools to keep the matter under review in the coming weeks with a view to assessing any accommodation needs arising in 2018.

Nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post-primary level are currently being carried out to determine where additional school accommodation is needed from 2019. Where demographic data indicates that additional provision is required, the delivery of such additional provision is dependent on the particular circumstances of each case and may, depending on the circumstances, be provided through either one, or a combination of, the following:

- Utilising existing unused capacity within a school or schools
- Extending the capacity of a school or schools
- Provision of a new school or schools.

School Accommodation Provision

240. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new places provided for primary education in the Greystones area in the past five years; the number of additional spaces planned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13552/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Since 2013, significant provision has been put in place in Greystones to cater for additional primary school places. This includes the construction of two new primary schools as well as providing 7 additional mainstream classrooms in existing primary schools. In total, this accommodation will provide capacity for approximately 1,000 pupils.

In addition, the building project to provide a permanent 24-mainstream classroom school for Greystones Community National School is currently at tender stage. This school, when constructed, will provide further capacity for over 600 pupils.

Questions Nos. 241 and 242 answered with Question No. 239.

School Accommodation

243. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status

of an appeal by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13587/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department received an application from the school referred to for the provision of additional accommodation. The application was assessed by my Department and it was determined that there was no deficit of essential accommodation at the school. This decision was advised to the school authority.

My Department recently received a request from the school for a review of the application and this is currently being considered. My Department will be in further contact with the school when the review has been completed.

Nursing Education

244. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of places available for mature students on the various nursing courses in GMIT Castlebar; his plans to provide additional places for mature students on these courses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13594/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The number of places set aside for mature students on the courses in question for 2018/19 are as follows:

- General Nursing - 4
- Psychiatric Nursing- 2

The current enrolment figures for mature students in both courses are documented in the following table.

Mature student enrolment figures for General and Psychiatric nursing in GMIT

-	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total
BACH- ELOR OF SCIENCE (HONOURS) IN GENER- AL NURS- ING	8	9	9	10	36
BACH- ELOR OF SCIENCE (HONOURS) IN PSY- CHIATRIC NURSING	5	7	4	8	24
Total	13	16	13	18	60

It should be noted that while there are a specific number of places made available for mature students, there are also three separate entry routes for mature students, which can mean that the number of mature students on a course can exceed the number of places specifically set aside for mature students.

The three separate entry routes for mature students are as follows:

1. Through the CAO using a previous qualification - Leaving Certificate, FETAC level 5 or 6 in competition with all other entrants on points. Places are awarded in August.

2. Through the CAO using the mature students route as a special category - (candidates must be 23 on 1 January in the year of entry to the course) applying through the CAO and filling in pages 3 & 4 of the application form.

a. Applicants who are 23 on 1 January in the year of entry are automatically called for interview in the disciplines they are called for and whichever campus they have applied for in May and assessed on the basis of:

- i. previous education work,
- ii. experience and demonstrated ability,
- iii. competence to undertake the programme.

b. Candidates are ranked in order from the interviews and places will be awarded in July and August, through the CAO

3. Through successful completion of one of the Access courses run by both NUIG and GMIT followed by a mature student's interview.

The National Access Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2015 - 2019) seeks to ensure that the student body entering into, participating in, and completing, higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population. This plan identifies 6 key target groups, one of which is first-time, mature student entrants, and contains actions to increase participation rates for this cohort.

Education Centre Network

245. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the name of each director and chairperson of the Donegal Education Centre in each of the years 2009 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13595/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The information sought by the deputy in relation to Donegal Education Centre is in tabular form as requested.

Year	Chairperson	Director
2009	Francis Cunningham	Sally Bonner
2010	Bernadette Brennan	Sally Bonner
2011	Bernadette Brennan	Sally Bonner
2012	Bernadette Brennan	Sally Bonner
2013	Bernadette Brennan	Sally Bonner
2014	Jacqui Dillon	Sally Bonner
2015	Jacqui Dillon	Sally Bonner/Jacqui Dillon
2016	Rosaleen Grant	Jacqui Dillon
2017	Rosaleen Grant	Jacqui Dillon
2018	Rosaleen Grant	Jacqui Dillon

Education Centre Network

246. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of companies that applied for the competition following the recent tendering process to appoint auditors to the education centre network; the name of the successful tenderer; the agreed price for the awarding contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13596/18]

247. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason external auditors have been appointed to audit all 21 education centres despite the fact that each centre will be carrying out internal audits by independent auditors; the reason each centre is being audited twice; the audit which will be considered the official audit for the annual report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13597/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 246 and 247 together.

Education Centres are independent statutory bodies under Section 37 of the Education Act (1998) and are managed by voluntary management committees elected annually and comprised mainly of teachers.

My Department is the main funder of Education Centres through direct budget allocations for administrative staff pay and operating costs. The Education Centres also receive significant funding from the support services which are funded entirely by my Department for the purpose of designing and delivering continuing professional development courses and other professional support for teachers throughout the country.

Under my Department's accountability arrangements, Centres are required to have their accounts audited and the audit report must be submitted along with the annual report. A number of matters have been identified in recent times concerning the adequacy of the audit and governance general.

Following a competition conducted through the Office of Government Procurement (OGP), 9 framework members who had previously qualified to form part of the OGP Framework for the provision of auditing services were contacted and Crowleys DFK Auditors was awarded the contract to undertake an external audit of the 2017 financial accounts of all Education Centres. This will provide assurances that all Centres are audited to a consistent standard in accordance with recognised auditing practice.

The Deputy may wish to note that Centres were given a derogation by the Department in respect of their obligation under the existing governance arrangements to conduct their own external audit of their 2017 financial accounts. Where Centres choose to engage their own auditors, they may submit this audit to the Department as part of their annual report.

As the OGP framework under which the contract was awarded to Crowleys is still live, it would not be appropriate to release commercially sensitive information which may disadvantage either the contractor or the awarding authority in future mini competitions.

Education Centre Network

248. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to ensure that all 21 education centres publish their annual reports from 2016 onwards on their websites; the reason this has not been the practice to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13598/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Education Centres are independent statutory bodies under Section 37 of the Education Act (1998) and are managed by voluntary management committees elected annually and comprised mainly of teachers. The network of Education Centres consists of 21 full time and 9 part time Centres. Their principal activity is to facilitate the local delivery of national programmes of teacher professional development on behalf of my Department. They also organise a varied local programme of activities for teachers, school management and parents in response to demand.

My Department is the main funder of Education Centres through direct budget allocations for administrative staff pay and operating costs. The Education Centres also receive significant funding from the support services which are funded entirely by my Department for the purpose of designing and delivering continuing professional development courses and other professional support for teachers throughout the country.

Centres are required to prepare and submit an annual report to my Department. Currently, Education Centres are not required to publish their annual reports on their website. However, some Centres do publish their annual reports on their websites and I am of the view that this is good practice as they are in receipt of exchequer funding. Officials of my Department will consider this further as part of the governance modernisation programme that my Department is undertaking in respect of Education Centres.

Education Centre Network

249. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the report commissioned by his Department regarding governance and accountability of education centres will be published; the key recommendations contained in the report; the fee paid to a company (details supplied) to carry out the report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13599/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Education Centres are independent statutory bodies under Section 37 of the Education Act (1998) and are managed by voluntary management committees elected annually and comprised mainly of teachers.

My Department is the main funder of Education Centres through direct budget allocations for administrative staff pay and operating costs. The Education Centres also receive significant funding from the support services which are funded entirely by my Department for the purpose of designing and delivering continuing professional development courses and other professional support for teachers throughout the country.

In general, the Department is undertaking significant efforts to further develop and implement consistent and robust governance arrangements across the education sector. This work is guided by a management board committee on sectoral governance chaired by the Secretary General and supported by a sectoral governance unit which undertakes work which supports the enhancement and standardisation of governance and accountability oversight across the Department, including implementation of the Code of Practice for Governance of State Bodies.

With regard to Education Centres, the Department has embarked upon a programme of governance modernisation to complement and update the previous requirements that Education Centres are required to observe, and in line with a desire to continually improve the governance and accountability structure in the sector. This programme will be informed by the Mazars Review of the Department's Governance, Funding and Accountability arrangements for Education Support Centres. The Department plans to circulate the final report to all Education Centres in

the coming weeks and it would be remiss of me to pre-empt the recommendations in that report. In addition, there have been developments in governance requirements for state funded bodies as outlined in the Code of Practice for State Bodies which need to be reflected in the sector

As the OGP framework under which the contract was awarded to Mazars is still live, it would not be appropriate to release commercially sensitive information which may disadvantage either the contractors or the awarding authority in future mini competitions.

Oideachas trí Ghaeilge

250. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Oideachais agus Scileanna cén fáth nach bhfuil an deontas €103 in aghaidh an dalta, a íocann a Roinn le hiar-bhunscoileanna a dhéanann teagasc trí Ghaeilge, á íoc le scoileanna a dhéanann teagasc trí Ghaeilge ach atá faoi choimirce Boird Oideachais agus Oiliúna; an bhfuil sé i gceist aige athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an mbeartas seo; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [13680/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Léiríonn na socruithe maoinithe atá déanta ag an Roinn d'iar-bhunscoileanna deonacha, cuimsitheacha, pobalscoileanna agus scoileanna Boird Oideachais agus Oiliúna (BOO), na socruithe difriúla bainistíochta agus úinéireachta atá i bhfeidhm do scoileanna dara-leibhéal.

Maoinítear iar-bhunscoileanna deontacha le deontais per capita. Faigheann na scoileanna seo deontas in ionad táillí a bhíodh toibhithe roimh 1967. Íoctar deontas per capita sa bhreis d'iar-bhunscoileanna san earnáil dheonach ina dtugtar teagasc trí mheán na Gaeilge go hiomlán nó i bpáirt. Ní íoctar an deontas sna hearnálacha Pobal nó Cuimsitheacha nó san earnáil BOO.

Déantar leithdháiltí airgeadas don earnáil BOO ar bhonn buiséid i dtaca le ceannoifig agus costais eile, iad sin a bhaineann le scoileanna san áireamh. Tugtar leibhéal ard féinrialach do BOO maidir le bainistíocht agus leithghabháil dá gcuid buiséid agus ceadáitear do gach BOO a leithdháiltí a roinnt ar aon dul lena dtosaíochtaí agus aireachtáil riachtanas. Caithfear aon shaincheisteanna maoinithe d'aon scoil ar leith a bhainistiú faoi bhuiséad an BOO cuí. Ní chuireann an Roinn in áirithe leithdháiltí maoinithe do scoileanna aonair san earnáil BOO.

Maidir le tuilleadh feabhsuithe i mbuiséid BOO a bhaineann le hábhair a mhúineadh trí mheán na Gaeilge, bheadh gá iad a mheasúnú i gcomhthéacs staidé iomláin buiséide na Roinne agus lena tosaíochtaí níos leithne i dtaca leis an bPlean Gníomhaíochta don Oideachas maraon le haon chuspóirí cuí eile.

Schools Designation

251. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a decision will issue regarding an application by a school (details supplied) for co-educational status; the reason for the delay in view of the need to inform parents of their choices in 2018-2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13682/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I can confirm to the Deputy that my Department received a number of requests last month in respect of change of status proposals from within a particular school planning area; the school referred to by the Deputy was one of the requests received.

I wish to advise that approval for a change of status is required from the Patron. In light of the number of schools seeking such a change my Department is in contact with the Patrons

office with a view to arranging a meeting, on a mutually suitable date, to progress the matter in respect of all schools involved.

School Staff

252. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the efforts being made to end the discriminatory two-tier system of payments made to school secretaries in primary and post-primary schools whereby there remain major discrepancies in the rates of pay and benefits received by those employed to provide secretarial services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13697/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In 1978 and 1979, schemes were initiated for the employment of Clerical Officers and Caretakers in primary and secondary schools. Staff employed on these schemes are paid directly by my Department and are not paid via grant funding. The 1978 and 1979 schemes are being phased out and have been superseded by a more extensive capitation grant scheme.

The majority of primary and voluntary secondary schools in the Free Education Scheme now receive capitation grant assistance to provide for secretarial, caretaking and cleaning services. Capitation related grants are issued to the majority of primary and post-primary schools to employ such staff. Within the capitation grant schemes, it is a matter for each individual school to decide how best to apply the grant funding to suit its particular needs.

Where a school uses the capitation grant funding to employ a secretary, such staff are employees of individual schools. My Department therefore does not have any role in determining the pay and conditions under which they are engaged. These are matters to be agreed between the staff concerned and the school authorities. My Department has no plans to develop an alternative scheme for schools to employ secretaries separate to the current system of capitation grant assistance.

Notwithstanding the above, in 2015 my Department agreed to engage with the union side in relation to the pay of school secretaries and caretakers who are employed using grant funding and to enter an arbitration process. The Arbitrator recommended a cumulative pay increase of 10% between 2016 and 2019 for school secretaries and caretakers comprehended by the terms of the arbitration process and that a minimum hourly pay rate of €13 for such staff be phased in over the period 2016 to 2019. Grant funding used by schools to fund the salaries of ancillary staff is also being improved on a phased basis between 2016 and 2019 following the arbitration process. These increases are in order to enable schools implement the arbitration outcome for grant funded secretaries and caretakers and to also implement the restoration of salary for cleaners arising from the unwinding of FEMPI legislation.

In December 2017, my Department published circular letter 0078/2017 for primary schools and circular letter 0079/2017 for voluntary secondary schools, setting out the application of the third phase increases of the Arbitrator's recommendations. The circulars are available at:

Circular 0078/2017: https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0078_2017.pdf.

Circular 0079/2017: http://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0079_2017.pdf.

The increases recommended by the Arbitrator are binding and must be applied by all schools who employ staff to whom the Arbitrator's recommendation applies.

Schools Building Projects Status

253. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the site acquisition process in respect of a school (details supplied) in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13742/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, a site to accommodate the building project for the school to which he refers was identified with the assistance of officials from the relevant local authority under the Memorandum of Understanding for the acquisition of school sites.

On the basis of the agreement in principle which was reached with the landowner, preliminary design work in respect of the school building project was commenced and work continues in that regard.

In the interim, the conveyancing phase of the site acquisition process has been in progress. Both Department officials and the vendor have been working to ensure that the land transfer can occur as soon as possible. The Department will continue to liaise with the relevant parties and the Chief State Solicitor's Office to advance matters and will keep the school patron informed of progress in that regard.

School Accommodation Provision

254. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the steps that have been taken to meet the temporary accommodation requirements of a school (details supplied) in County Cork for the 2018-2019 school year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13743/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The project for the school referred to by the Deputy has been devolved to the patron body, Educate Together, for delivery. The Patron body has appointed a consultant to deliver the accommodation project.

A planning application has been submitted for temporary school accommodation which will consist of 12 classrooms with en-suite toilets, staffroom, 4 support rooms, Principals' office, administration office, staff toilets and storage to accommodate and consolidate the school on the Garryduff Sports Centre site.

In tandem with the planning application for Garryduff Sports Centre a planning application will be lodged shortly for two additional temporary classrooms at the Douglas Hall site in case the Garryduff Sports Centre provision is delayed in any way.

School Curriculum

255. **Deputy Pat Deering** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of hard-copies of primary language curriculum handbooks for English-medium schools still available from his Department; if same will be reprinted for schools to provide a copy for each teacher; if there will be a charge for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13755/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The Primary Language Curriculum for Junior Infants to 2nd Class was introduced in September 2016. All schools were provided with hard copies of the curriculum, one for each teacher, in the spring of 2016.

Copies were also made available to Teacher Training Colleges to provide trainee teachers with copies. My Department currently has less than 100 copies remaining and currently there are no plans to reprint it. The curriculum along with support material is available online at:

<https://curriculumonline.ie/Primary/Curriculum-Areas/Language-New-Junior-infants-2nd-class>.

Schools Building Projects Data

256. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of school building projects that have been required to apply to local authorities for an extension of duration of planning permission due to delays; and the detail of each. [13758/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Seven major school building projects at Architectural Planning Stage have been required to apply to local authorities for an extension of duration of planning permission due to delays. The detail of each project are listed in the attached spreadsheet.

While it is a rare occurrence, it can happen that a project may experience delays following a grant of planning permission for a number of reasons. For example, a need to appoint a replacement architect or engineer on the design team, a legal challenge to a grant of planning permission, delays in securing a site or an extension to a site and changes sought in the brief by the school following the grant of planning permission. In some cases the delay can be attributable to an underperforming design team.

Included on the attached spreadsheet are two projects where an extension of planning permission has been sought and a decision is currently awaited from the Local Authority.

County	Roll No	School	Date Grant of PP extended from	Comment re delays
Cavan	19439B	Holy Family Special School	12/01/18	Changes to brief by the school following the grant of planning permission, need to appoint a replacement M&E engineer on the design team and delays while various decant proposals explored.
Longford	19429V	St. Christopher's Special School	17/07/17	Issues with Design Team
Donegal	19927O	Scoil Mhuire Stranorlar	12/05/17	Site acquired with conditional planning permission. Revised Brief Formulation Report necessary to take account of PP conditions imposed. Fire Safety Certificate appealed to An Bord Pleanála.

County	Roll No	School	Date Grant of PP extended from	Comment re delays
Cork	19415K	Scoil An athar Tadhg	09/01/18	Significant changes proposed by school to scope of project.
Cork	19993E	Gaelscoil An Ghoirt Álainn	08/12/16	Planning Permission appealed to An Bord Pleanála twice & a legal challenge to Planning Permission pending acquisition of site.
County	Roll No	School	Extension of PP application with Local Authority with effect from	Comment re delays
Meath	17705J	Whitecross	22/01/18	Full grant of Planning Permission received 13/1/14. Delays occurred due to school submitting various options for temporary decant and subsequent need to apply for statutory approvals for temporary decant off site.
Meath	18106P	Lismullen	19/02/18	Full grant of Planning Permission received 13/9/13. Issues with the Design Team contributed to delays.

Summer Works Scheme Applications

257. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application for the summer works scheme by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13773/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The current Summer Works Scheme (SWS) 2016 -2017 was applied on a multi-annual basis. The Deputy will be aware that nearly 50% of schools have applied for inclusion under the scheme which reflects a very high demand.

Almost €80 million has been approved to date under the Summer Works Scheme, in respect of over 640 school projects in categories 1 - 6. Details of the successful school applicants are published on my Department's website www.education.ie.

The 2018 budgetary provision will allow my Department to meet the carry over costs of summer works projects already approved. The assessment of applications in the remaining categories 7-10, including the application from the school referred to by the Deputy for a category 7 project, is reliant on the availability of funding.

Schools Establishment

258. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there are plans from a new co-educational, multid denominational, non-fee-paying, second-level school for children attending primary schools of such an ethos in Dublin 6, Dublin 6W, Dublin 8 and Dublin 12; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13778/18]

259. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has identified a methodology and timeframe for the determination of a catchment area for a proposed school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13779/18]

260. **Deputy Kathleen Funchion** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the patronage of a proposed school (details supplied) will be decided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13780/18]

262. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for a new co-educational, multid denominational, non-fee-paying, second-level school for children attending primary schools in Dublin 6, Dublin 6W, Dublin 8 and Dublin 12. [13823/18]

263. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has identified a methodology and timeframe for the determination of the catchment area for a proposed school (details supplied). [13824/18]

264. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the patronage of a proposed school (details supplied) will be decided. [13825/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 258 to 260, inclusive, and 262 to 264, inclusive, together.

As the Deputies may be aware, in order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas. My Department uses a Geographical Information System to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. This system uses data from a range of sources. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises at primary and post primary level to determine where additional school accommodation is needed.

Such exercises, involving all school planning areas including the areas referred to by the Deputies, are currently ongoing. It is anticipated that decisions based on these exercises will be announced in the coming weeks, after which patronage processes will be run to decide who will operate each school.

A patronage process is run after it has been decided, based on demographic analysis, that a new school is required. This patronage process is open to all patron bodies and prospective patrons. Parental preferences for each patron from parents of children who reside in the school planning areas concerned, together with the extent of diversity currently available in these areas, are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process.

The patronage process for new schools is overseen by an external independent advisory group, the New Schools Establishment Group (NSEG). Following their consideration of my Department's assessment reports, the NSEG submits a report with recommendations to me for consideration and final decision. The assessment reports and the NSEG recommendations for all such patronage processes are available on my Department's website.

261. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there are guidelines or legislation in place in relation to ensuring school places in schools for children of Irish citizens who are serving the State overseas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13789/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In relation to school admissions, parents can choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available the pupil should be admitted. However, in schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection process may be necessary.

This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, this may result in some pupils not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice.

Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998 provides for an appeal by a parent or guardian to the Secretary General of my Department, or in the case of an Educational Training Board (ETB) school to the ETB in the first instance, where a Board of Management of a school, or a person acting on behalf of the Board, refuses to enrol a student in a school, expels a student or suspends a student for 20 or more days in any school year. Further information on the Section 29 appeals process is available on the Department's website www.education.ie.

The Education Welfare Service of the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) is the statutory agency which can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child. The EWS can be contacted at 01-7718500.

Through the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill I intend to ban the use of waiting lists by schools, as these discriminate against those who have recently moved into an area, those who rent, or those who have worked overseas and are returning home.

The current provision in the Bill will allow for the phasing out of pre-existing waiting lists over a 5 year period.

The Bill is currently awaiting report stage in the Dáil.

Questions Nos. 262 to 264, inclusive, answered with Question No. 258.

School Patronage

265. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the ownership of a school (details supplied) in County Louth will be clarified. [13852/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department understands that the school referred to by the Deputy is in the ownership of the Archdiocese of Armagh.

Schools Site Acquisitions

266. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when a site for a new school (details supplied) will be purchased and publicly announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13862/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The building project for

the school referred to by the Deputy is included in the Department's 6 year construction programme.

Officials in the Department continue to work closely with officials in the relevant local authority in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the acquisition of a suitable location for the school.

Due to commercial sensitivities it is not possible to provide further information at this time but my Department is working to advance the site acquisition process for the school in question and the school patron will be informed of the permanent location as soon as it is possible to do so.

State Examinations

267. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a review of the decision to refuse a reasonable accommodations application for the junior certificate for a child (details supplied) in County Cork in view of the circumstances that apply. [13870/18]

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

In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

School Staff

268. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if circular 0071/2014 will be reviewed with a view to defining exceptional circumstances; if the circumstances and criteria for such exceptional circumstances will be set out; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13874/18]

269. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of transfers of teachers relying on exceptional circumstances in relation to circular 0071/2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13875/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 268 and 269 together.

Circular 0059/2009 set out the disciplinary procedures for teachers employed by Vocational Education Committees (VEC). A separate Circular (Circular 60/2009) sets out the disciplinary procedures for non-VEC teachers. The procedures were negotiated and agreed with the education partners in accordance with Section 24(3) of the Education Act, 1998.

Circular 0059/2009 was superseded by Circular 0071/2014 in October 2014 to account for the merger of VECs into Education and Training Boards (ETBs). Where an ETB is dealing with performance or conduct issues in respect of a teacher, the use of Circular 0071/2014 is mandatory. The procedures set out in Circular 0071/2014 may be commenced or ceased at different stages by the employer depending on the circumstances of the individual case concerned. The Circular does not set out exceptional circumstances and I have no plans to review this matter.

As the Circular does not set out exceptional circumstances, my Department has no informa-

tion on the number of transfers of teachers relying on such circumstances. My Department does not hold information generally on the number of teacher transfers which may have occurred as a result of Circular 0071/2014.

School Accommodation Provision

270. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the review with respect to a school (details supplied) which was due for completion in mid-January 2018; the direct contact with the school not followed through on; the reason this deadline has been missed; and when the project will proceed to construction stage. [13892/18]

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

In this regard, the schedule of accommodation for the new school has been finalised. As agreed with the school authority, the schedule of accommodation issued to the school authority when finalised and it was furnished to the school on the 6th March. The next stage involves the commencement of the architectural planning process and my Department will be in further contact with the school in this context.

School Accommodation Provision

271. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to provide primary schools in Swords; his views on the need for a primary school in the River Valley and Ridgewood area of Swords; the meetings that have taken place with his Departmental officials on this matter in recent months; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13902/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department has recently contacted all of the primary schools in the Swords area to review their projected enrolments for September 2018. The schools concerned generally commenced their enrolment process for the new junior infants in early January of this year and this process is not yet complete. In that regard, the level of demand for all schools is not available at this point. Each school has issued invitations for enrolment through school notes and local announcements and are currently offering places in line with their respective enrolment policies. My Department will continue to liaise with the schools and their Patrons to keep the matter under review in the coming weeks with a view to putting any necessary arrangements in place to address any accommodation needs arising in 2018. Nationwide demographic exercises which will determine where new schools will be needed from 2019 are currently ongoing and it is anticipated that decisions based on these exercises will be announced in the coming weeks.

Schools Building Projects Status

272. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the timeframe for the opening of a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13908/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school referred to by the Deputy forms part of Schools Bundle 5, the PPP project which has been impacted by the liquidation of Carillion.

The Dutch Infrastructure Fund (DIF), representing the PPP Company responsible for delivery of Schools Bundle 5, is currently implementing a rectification plan to secure service commencement on the five school buildings and one further education college as soon as possible.

DIF has indicated that a number of contractors/service providers have now been invited to quote for finishing the works outstanding on the relevant buildings and for the provision of facilities management services over the 25-year life of the project. It expects to receive final bids from tenderers, with whom it has already had extensive engagement, by early April.

Based on this, and the expected timeframe for the evaluation of tenders, and appointment and mobilisation of the new contractor/service providers, DIF is targeting all six buildings to be operational for the beginning of the coming school year, with the most advanced schools - which includes the school referred to by the Deputy - to be delivered earlier in the summer.

DIF has confirmed that, in conjunction with its lenders, it will deploy all necessary resources towards achieving these target dates.

Schools Building Projects Status

273. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a permanent building project for a school (details supplied) will be prioritised to enable it to move to tender and construction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13916/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The building project referred to by the Deputy is for a new sixteen classroom school building and a two classroom special needs unit.

The project is currently at Stage 2B of Architectural Planning - Detailed Design Stage, which includes applications for all statutory consents, including Planning Permission, Disability Access Certificate and Fire Safety Certificate and also the preparation of tender documentation. Planning Permission for this project was received in January 2017.

The Stage 2B report has been received and reviewed by my Department, with a number of issues to be addressed by the Design Team before the stage can be finalised.

School Accommodation Provision

274. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a schedule of accommodation for an approved extension of a school (details supplied) will be provided; if a timeframe is available for work to commence and finish; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13970/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy is aware, a building project for the school to which he refers is included in my Department's 6 Year Construction Programme. In the context of progressing the building project, my Department has undertaken a site visit to the school.

The building project will be devolved to Kildare Wicklow Education Training Board (KWETB) for delivery and it is my Department's intention to engage with KWETB shortly in this regard.

School Accommodation Provision

275. **Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason applicants for funding of central activities spaces within new ASD units are being refused (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14000/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy that in cases where an ASD unit is approved as an extension to a mainstream school the existing available school accommodation is considered in order to establish the level of additional accommodation to be provided.

It is considered that a centrally located space can be used to promote contact with mainstream students. This space can be used by teaching staff for group class work, drama and used for play. Where a General Purpose room is available within the existing school accommodation it is considered that this is appropriate to meet the requirements for integration; a central activities space is not therefore provided.

Information and Communications Technology

276. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will promote a public awareness campaign targeting parents and children and young persons regarding the importance of digital citizenship and online safety; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14035/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): My Department is responsible for teaching and learning in schools. In this regard, there is a prescribed curriculum in place that covers a broad range of learning needs including the use of technologies and wellbeing.

My Department has a broad suite of policies to support the safe and appropriate use of digital technologies in schools. For example, the SPHE curriculum at primary level contains a strand on Media Education, and as with all curriculum content, teachers are enabled to mediate this to children. The PDST (Technology in Education) is a dedicated team established and funded by the Department to advise and support schools in the area of digital technologies, including issues of internet safety. Schools are advised on the following matters: the development and implementation of an Acceptable Usage Policy (governing the use of the internet in schools); the promotion of awareness regarding safety online; and the implementation of a content filtering/monitoring system.

Through the Webwise Internet Safety Initiative which is funded by my department, resources are also provided to support teachers to integrate internet safety into teaching and learning in their schools. Webwise also provide information, advice, and tools to parents to support their engagement in their children's online lives. With the help of the Webwise Youth Advisory Panel they develop youth oriented awareness raising resources and campaigns that address topics such as social networking, sexting, cyber bullying.

The Webwise Initiative is part of the Safer Internet Ireland Project coordinated by the Office for Internet Safety (an Executive Office of the Department of Justice & Equality) to develop national initiatives promoting the safer use of electronic media and enhance protection of the vulnerable, particularly children, against the downside of the internet. The project is a consortium of industry, education, child welfare and government partners that provide Safer Internet awareness, hotline and helpline functions and activities. Webwise promotes the autonomous,

effective, and safer use of the internet by young people through a sustained information and awareness strategy targeting parents, teachers, and children themselves with consistent and relevant messages.

In 2017 alone there were in excess of 618,000 recorded users of the website (webwise.ie) with a total of 921,000 page views. Supporting resource booklets are free to order or download from Webwise.ie.

There are no plans for a public campaign at this time. My Department collaborates with a number of Departments with responsibility in this area. The Department of Justice and Equality has the lead role in coordinating Government policy concerning internet safety, through the Office for Internet Safety. The Departments of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE) Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education & Skills all have key roles.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

277. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an alternative school placement can be found for a person (details supplied) who has been expelled from school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14040/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible for organising and planning provision for children with Special Educational Needs, including the establishment of special classes in mainstream primary and post primary schools.

Parents/Guardians who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement, including special class placement, should contact their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) who can assist in identifying an appropriate educational placement for their child. Contact details are available at <http://ncse.ie/seno-contact-list> .

The enrolment of a child in a school is a matter, in the first instance, for the parents of the child and the Board of Management of a school. My Department and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has no role in relation to processing applications for enrolment to schools.

Accordingly, the NCSE advises parents, to seek to enrol their child, by applying in writing, to the school/s of their choice. Where parents have been unsuccessful in enrolling their child in a special school placement, they should update their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) to inform the planning process.

It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998. The selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. Under section 15 (2) (d) of the Education Act 1998, each school is legally obliged to publish its enrolment policy.

Section 29 of the Education Act 1998, provides parents with an appeal process where a board of management of a school or a person acting on behalf of the Board refuses enrolment to a student. Where a school refuses to enrol a pupil, the school is obliged to inform parents of their right under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 to appeal that decision to either the relevant Educational Training Board or to the Secretary General of this Department.

The NCSE works in collaboration with the Educational Welfare Services (EWS) of the Child and Family Agency which is the statutory agency that can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child or can offer assistance where a child is out of school. The local service is delivered through the national network of Educational Welfare Officers (EWO). Contact details are available at <http://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/education-and-welfare/>.

Where there is no placement available for a child with Special Educational Needs, this Department will consider applications under the Home Tuition Grant Scheme, where a student can receive up to 20 hours home tuition per week as an interim measure until a placement becomes available.

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

School Accommodation Provision

278. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the way in which a school can apply for a devolved grant for a school extension or upgrade; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14057/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I wish to advise the Deputy of my Department's Additional School Accommodation (ASA) Scheme under which a school may apply for the provision of additional accommodation where a deficit has been identified. The purpose of the ASA scheme is to ensure that essential classroom accommodation is available to cater for pupils enrolled each year and where the need cannot be met by the school's existing accommodation.

Applications are considered in the context of the very significant challenges facing my Department in prioritising available capital funding for essential mainstream classrooms to meet the demand for extra school places, such as in the case where an additional teacher has been appointed.

The ASA application form may be accessed on my Department's website www.education.ie.

School Accommodation Provision

279. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of applications for additional classroom spaces and an application for a new classroom teacher by a school (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14061/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The school referred to by the Deputy has submitted an application to my Department for additional accommodation in recent days to facilitate an additional mainstream teacher post approved, for the school in question, for September 2018.

The application will be assessed by my Department and a decision will be conveyed to the school authority when the assessment process has concluded.

School Staff Appeals Mechanism

280. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a staffing appeal submitted by a school (details supplied) was rejected; the further recourse available to the school to have this decision re-examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14078/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): The criteria used for the allocation of teaching posts is published annually on the Department website. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30 September.

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

The staffing schedule also includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit a staffing appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board. Details of the appeal process and application form are available in Circular 0010/2018, “Staffing Arrangements in Primary Schools for the 2018/19 School Year”, which is published on the Department website.

The school referred to by the Deputy submitted an application for consideration by the Appeals Board at its March meeting under the Class size criteria. The Appeals Board considered the appeal and determined that it did not satisfy all the published criteria as set out in Circular 0010/2018

The school has been notified of the outcome of the appeal. The Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final.

Special Educational Needs Service Provision

281. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the difficulties schools are experiencing owing to the deficiencies in the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 and Criminal Justice (Spent Convictions and Certain Disclosures) Act 2016; if his attention has been further drawn to the practicalities of the employment of substitute special needs assistants in schools; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that these difficulties sometimes result in schools having no choice but to send pupils with special educational needs home due to the fact their welfare cannot be adequately protected; his plans with the Minister for Justice and Equality to address this legislative deficiency; the practical guidance he will provide to schools to address this issue pending the necessary amending legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14111/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): In April 2016, my colleague, the Minister for Justice and Equality commenced the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016 (the Vetting Act) which put in place statutory requirements for the Garda vetting of persons involved in working with children and vulnerable persons.

The Vetting Act applies not just to schools but to any relevant organisation that employs, contracts, permits or places a person in relevant work with children or vulnerable persons.

The vetting legislation and the vetting procedures operated by the National Vetting Bureau fall within the remit of the Minister for Justice and Equality. However, when the statutory vetting requirements were commenced my Department issued circular 0031/2016 which set out

the statutory vetting requirements applicable to schools along with the practical arrangements in place to support the vetting procedures.

The circular outlines that the Vetting Act allows for some limited exemptions to the requirement under Section 12(1) of the Act to obtain a vetting disclosure from the National Vetting Bureau prior to commencing an employment, including in certain circumstances in the case of persons such as special needs assistants (SNA's) undertaking recurring substitute employment in a particular school. The exemptions include-

- where a person was previously employed as a substitute by that same school authority prior to 29 April 2016.

- where a vetting disclosure from the Bureau was received by the school authority in respect of the person's initial substitute employment, in such a case, there is no requirement for that school authority to obtain a further vetting disclosure from the Bureau in respect of that person prior to employing him or her in subsequent substitute positions.

Schools may also maintain a list of prospective substitute SNA employees and in doing so ensure that, as far as possible, a vetting disclosure is obtained at the point on which the person is being added to that list or as soon as possible thereafter (rather than waiting until when the person is about to commence his or her employment). In this way schools can ensure that the vetting disclosure has been obtained in sufficient time to allow that SNA to commence work in the school at short notice.

School Accommodation Provision

282. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to open a school (details supplied) in County Waterford; the status of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14122/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): As the Deputy will be aware, I have announced new plans aimed at accelerating the provision of multi-denominational and non-denominational schools across the country, in line with the choices of parents, families and school communities and the Programme for Government commitment to reach 400 such schools by 2030.

I would point out that the previous model of patronage divestment yielded only a very limited number of schools for transfer to multi-denominational patrons (10 since 2013). I believe that the new schools reconfiguration for diversity process has the potential to significantly increase patron diversity in our school system.

While these new structures are being introduced, my Department will continue to work with the main stakeholders to progress delivery of diversity in areas already identified, of which the area referred to by the Deputy is one.

School Accommodation Provision

283. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when an additional school accommodation application submitted in 2016 by a board (details supplied) will be made available to the board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14123/18]

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

The application is currently under consideration by my Department in the context of the requirement for increased special education provision in the area. On completion of this process my Department will be in further contact with the school authority.

Services for People with Disabilities

284. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if there are grants available to schools to make them more accessible for persons with disabilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14141/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): I am pleased to inform the Deputy that my Department administers the Emergency Works Scheme which is solely for unforeseen emergencies or to provide funding to facilitate inclusion and access for special needs pupils. The scheme is always open and the application form and circular are available on my Departments website.

Special Educational Needs Staff

285. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the SNA allocation for a school (details supplied) will be retained; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14249/18]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Richard Bruton): Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) are provided to assist recognised schools to cater for pupils with disabilities, who have additional and significant care needs, in an educational context and where the nature of these care needs have been outlined in medical and other professional reports as being so significant that a pupil will require additional adult assistance in order to be able to attend school and to participate in education.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), which is an independent statutory agency, is responsible, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) for allocating a quantum of Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for each school annually taking into account the assessed care needs of children qualifying for SNA support enrolled in the school.

The NCSE allocates SNA support to schools in accordance with the criteria set out in Department Circular 0030/2014, which is available on the Department's website at www.education.ie, in order that students who have care needs can access SNA support as and when it is needed. My Department's policy is to ensure that every child who is assessed as needing SNA support will receive access to such support.

In considering applications for SNA supports for individual pupils, the SENOs take account of the pupils' needs and consider the resources available to the school to identify whether additionality is needed or whether the school might reasonably be expected to meet the needs of the pupils from its current level of resources. SNAs are not allocated to individual children but to schools as a school based resource.

Schools who wish to make applications for SNA support should apply to the NCSE. The

deadline for applying for SNA support for the 2018/19 school year was extended from 28 February to the 7th March 2018 due to the effects of adverse weather. The NCSE continues to accept applications after this date.

The NCSE aims to respond in May 2018 to valid applications for access to SNA support received.

The NCSE Appeals Process may be invoked by a parent or a school where it is considered that a child was not granted access to SNA support on the grounds that Department policy was not met in accordance with Circular 0030/2014.

Schools may also appeal a decision, where the school considers that the NCSE, in applying Department policy, has not allocated the appropriate level of SNA supports to the school to meet the special educational and/or care needs of the child/ren concerned.

If a parent considers that their child is not accessing a sufficient level of SNA support they should address their concerns to the school in the first instance.

All schools have the contact details of their local SENO and parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available at <http://ncse.ie/seno-contact-list>.

Immigrant Investor Programme Data

286. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of social or affordable homes that have been built as a result of investment made through the immigrant investor programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13575/18]

291. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of affordable and social homes built and the value of investment in these areas made through the immigrant investor programme to date and in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13577/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 286 and 291 together.

I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the Immigrant Investor Programme (IIP) was introduced by the Government in April 2012 to encourage inward investment so as to create business and employment opportunities in the State.

The programme provides investors with the opportunity to invest in Ireland. Key to the programme is that the investments are beneficial for Ireland, generate or sustain employment and are generally in the public interest. In that context, where applications for social housing investment related projects are submitted they are evaluated against these criteria and approval granted where the criteria are met.

To date, 166 applications have been received for 33 individual projects with a proposed investment of €124m in social housing projects. In 2017, 33 applications for 14 projects to the value of €33m have been approved in respect of social housing projects, with a further 22 applications awaiting final decision. As there continues to be a high demand for Social Housing, this programme will remain open to appropriate applications in this area.

I am unable to provide the Deputy with details of the operation of specific projects submit-

ted in relation to social housing as my Department does not have information on the number of houses which have been built.

Departmental Agencies Staff Data

287. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of requests for additional funding, staff resources or expertise that have been made by the Data Protection Commission since January 2016; the purpose of the requested additional funding staff resources or expertise; the response of his Department to each request in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13714/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As an office under the aegis of my Department, the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner (ODPC) is allocated its staffing budget from within the Justice and Equality Vote. The ODPC makes an assessment of the staffing resources required to meet its business objectives through my Department's workforce planning process and these requirements are submitted each year as part of the formal Estimates process.

There is ongoing engagement with the ODPC in relation to the level of resources required and this is reflected in the increased budget allocated to the Office over the period 2014 to 2018. The total budget and staffing since Jan 2016 is outlined in the table:

	Total Budget	Number of staff
2016	€4.7 million	52
2017	€7.5 million	74
Current	€11.7 million	83

Recruitment in the ODPC is on-going, with a financial allocation in 2018 which will allow the office to grow to approximately 135 staff.

The increased budget is reflective of the additional staffing and other resource requirements of the Office in view of the fundamental transformation to the data protection environment arising from the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation this year. The increased funding fully reflects the importance of a stable and effective data protection regulatory environment in relation to the personal data of individuals, the broader economy and in particular the continuing expansion and growth of the digital technology sector, as well as the Office's enhanced role as lead supervisory authority for many of the multinational technology companies located in Ireland. The resource requirements will continue to be monitored on an on going basis.

Data Protection

288. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to bring forward appropriate legislation to hold technology companies accountable for the protection of data and requiring the timely removal of data when children and young persons are bullied and or exploited; his further plans to ensure a child's rights to be forgotten online; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14107/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The position is that the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which comes into force on 25 May, generally provides for higher standards of data protection for individuals (data subjects), and imposes

increased obligations on bodies in the public and private sectors that process personal data (data controllers and processors). It also increases the range of possible sanctions for infringements of these standards and obligations. At the heart of the GDPR is a “risk-based” approach to data protection. This means that each data controller and data processor is required to put appropriate technical and organisational measures in place in order to ensure – and to be able to demonstrate – that their processing of personal data complies with the new data protection standards.

The GDPR also imposes an obligation on data controllers and data processors involved in high risk processing to carry out a data protection impact assessment (DPIA) prior to the commencement of processing operations. Where the DPIA indicates that risks identified in relation to the processing of personal data cannot be mitigated, the controllers and processors will be required to consult with the Data Protection Commission before engaging in the processing.

Part 3 of the Data Protection Bill 2018 gives further effect to the GDPR in a number of areas in which the GDPR gives Member State a margin of flexibility. During Seanad Report Stage, I tabled amendments to insert new sections 31 and 32 in the Bill, which will provide for increased protections for the personal data of children. Section 31 provides that the Data Protection Commission will encourage the drawing up of codes of conduct intended to contribute to the proper application of the GDPR with regard to the following:

- (a) the protection of children,
- (b) the information to be provided by a controller to children,
- (c) the manner in which the consent of the holders of parental responsibility over a child is to be obtained for the purposes of Article 8 of the GDPR, and
- (d) integrating the necessary safeguards into processing in order to protect the rights of children in an age-appropriate manner.

Section 32 introduces a specific “right-to-be-forgotten” for children. This will strengthen the rights of children to erasure of any personal data collected during the provision to them of information society services referred to in Article 8.1 of the GDPR.

Matters relating to possible future establishment of an Office of Digital Safety Commissions are being considered by the Minister and Department for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment. In a related context, the European Commission is expected to announce proposals arising from its monitoring of online platforms’ compliance with its Communication on Illegal Content Online later this year.

Peace Commissioners

289. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there are guidelines for peace commissioners using their PC suffix while advocating a particular position in referenda campaigns (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13534/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): Peace Commissioners are appointed by the Minister for Justice and Equality under Section 88 of the Courts of Justice Act, 1924. It is an honorary position and a Peace Commissioner receives no remuneration or compensation from public funds.

At present the powers and duties of a Peace Commissioner are primarily the taking of statu-

tory declarations; witnessing signatures on documents; signing certificates and orders under various Acts.

Unless the use of the suffix 'PC' or "Peace Commissioner" is clearly intended to improperly imply an authority or function in a matter unrelated to that title, or its use brings the title into disrepute, no issue arises concerning the expression of personal views by Peace Commissioners while using that suffix.

Garda Recruitment

290. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if new recruits in relation to Garda recruitment are still being drawn from those that applied in 2016; when those that applied in 2017 and that have completed all stages in the process to be contacted with a formal offer of employment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13568/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, the recruitment process for An Garda Síochána is governed by the Garda Síochána (Admissions and Appointments) Regulations 2013. The Public Appointments Service (PAS), on behalf of the Garda Commissioner, manages the initial stages of the process with the final stages, involving a physical competency test, a medical examination and vetting of candidates, being managed by the Garda Commissioner. As Minister, I have no direct involvement in the matter.

The time frame for completing the final stages can vary due to a number factors. These include the length of the vetting process which may, for example, be more time consuming if the applicant has resided abroad; whether the applicant has to repeat the physical; or is deferred for medical reasons. Positions in the Garda College are only offered when all stages of the application process are completed and in accordance with an applicant's place on the Order of Merit.

I am informed by the Commissioner that successful candidates are still being called from the 2016 competitions and it is expected that successful candidates from the 2017 competition will enter the College towards the middle of this year.

I would advise any candidate for a position as a Garda trainee to contact the PAS or the Garda Appointments Office if they have any queries in relation to their application.

Question No. 291 answered with Question No. 286.

Residency Permits

292. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of a stamp 4 application in relation to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13582/18]

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 applied for a right of residency, accompanied by a right to work, based on their parentage of an Irish citizen child. The application was received in the relevant section of INIS on 24 April 2017. INIS has been in contact with the applicant seeking further information and clarification on several occasions. The application is under consideration at present and INIS will be in contact with the person concerned in due course.

The Deputy may wish to note that 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.

Personal Insolvency Practitioners

293. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans for legislative change in view of the ruling regarding the standing of personal insolvency practitioners, PIPs, in reviews as per section 115A of the Personal Insolvency Act 2012 in order to remove ambiguity; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13616/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): My officials are studying the recent High Court judgment to which the Deputy refers, which appears to have further clarified earlier High Court judgments in relation to the standing of personal insolvency practitioners ('PIPs').

In particular, the judgment stated that it is not appropriate for a creditor to seek an order for their legal costs against a PIP in a routine or ordinary personal insolvency case, even if decided in favour of the creditor, and that the courts would not condone creditor correspondence indicating that such application would be made.

Some procedural aspects of the cases concerned are still being worked out before the court, so the Court's order has not yet been finalised and the period for appeal is not yet closed. Accordingly, it is not appropriate to make a statement at this point.

Garda Operations

294. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the role of An Garda Síochána in the event that a person is reported by a member of the public as being suicidal in a public place with their life being in imminent danger; the protocols that apply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13676/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that there are protocols in place for Garda members to respond to the type of event referred to in the Deputy's question. These are set out in the 'Guidelines for First Responders – Suicidal Subjects'.

This policy sets out the process for declaring a 'Hostage/Barricade/Suicide' incident. When such an incident is declared, a trained 'Operational Commander' is deployed to take command of the incident. The Operational Commander will use all Garda resources available to him/her to assist the person whose life is in imminent danger. There are currently 35 trained Operational Commanders within An Garda Síochána with plans to train more during May 2018. Both the Negotiators and Operational Commanders receive mandatory refresher training annually.

The National Negotiation Unit and the Armed Support Unit (ASU) are routinely deployed to resolve incidents involving persons with suicidal intentions.

The National Negotiation Unit has a panel of seventy-five trained Garda Negotiators spread across every Garda region as an on-call resource. These negotiators should be deployed to any

incident of the type described by the Deputy to begin dialogue with a view to influencing a safe conclusion. Training, deployment and governance of these negotiators rests with the National Negotiation Unit.

Arrangements are also in place which allow Garda Hostage Negotiators to access advice from a panel of Mental Health professionals if required to assist in a 'Hostage/Barricade/Suicide' incident.

The Armed Support Units (ASU), which are based in every Garda region across the State, receive training in the resolution of such incidents and carry a range of Less Lethal Devices should an intervention be required in order to protect life.

Garda Station Refurbishment

295. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the Garda stations in the Waterford division that received major refurbishments in 2016, 2017 and to date in 2018; the works that were done in each station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13693/18]

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

I have, however, been informed by the Garda authorities that, in the period 2016 to date, major refurbishments to a value of €288,000 have been sanctioned at a number of Garda stations in Waterford. These included the replacement of windows in Dungarvan Garda Station, the modernisation of the public office, reception area and front entrance in Tramore Garda Station and the installation of CCTV in the custody suite in Waterford Garda Station. The total sanctioned for these three jobs is €288,000. The works in Dungarvan have been completed. The works in Tramore will be completed in May. The works in Waterford are currently at a design stage.

I have been further informed that, in addition to the above, during the period referenced by the Deputy some 38 smaller works to a value of €177,000 have been carried out across the Division.

Prison Deaths

296. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the recommendations of a report (details supplied) have been implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13741/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Irish Prison Service has advised that in the tragic circumstances of a death in custody (of which there have been three cases in Castlerea Prison since 2009) every effort is made to ensure the attendance of a Doctor to pronounce death as soon as possible following the event.

They have further advised that an arrangement is currently in place whereby a locum General Practitioner attends Castlerea Prison five mornings per week, and also provides on call GP cover on Saturday and Sunday. Castlerea Prison has 24 hour nurse cover and, where necessary,

referrals can be made to the local hospitals.

Garda Youth Diversion Projects

297. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the contact he has had with the independent Garda youth diversion project service providers in relation to the proposed new service delivery model which is based on Garda divisions; the implications this new model will have on the ability of independent and smaller organisations to tender for these projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13785/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): As the Deputy may be aware, my Department is obliged to carry out a Call for proposals process during 2018 in relation to the provision of Garda Youth Diversion Project (GYDP) services, to fully comply with requirements related to the co-funding of projects by the European Social Fund Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020.

To ensure State-wide coverage of GYDP services for young people, (which does not exist at present), the intention is that, in general, service provision will be aligned with Garda Divisions or other appropriate local areas with a distinct community identity as may be agreed during a wide ranging consultation process which is currently ongoing. Issues of community identity and numbers of potential participants on GYDPs in the area will be key considerations here.

The provision of GYDP services in all parts of the State has obvious advantages, particularly in terms of providing services for significant numbers of young people who cannot currently access them. I might add that an independent evaluation report of the operation of an integrated approach to delivery of GYDP services within County Kerry, commissioned by my Department is expected shortly. This report will help with the further development of the Call for Proposals documentation.

My Department is very much aware of concerns expressed by youth justice workers and their representatives. I can assure the Deputy that careful consideration is being given to all issues raised by stakeholders involved in GYDPs, including those of independent service providers, as part of the ongoing consultation process. This process includes arrangements for an extensive series of meetings with community based organisations and project workers which will facilitate closer communication and exchange of information in relation to these matters. The consultation process will help to inform further development of the approach in advance of the Call for Proposals being issued.

In addition, the consultations will include arrangements to hear the views of young people, including participants or former participants on GYDPs.

GYDPs deliver valuable services for young people who have committed a crime or may be at risk of offending as well as providing important support for An Garda Síochána at local level. I can assure the Deputy that in the context of the Call for Proposals my Department is committed to ensuring continuity of service for participants on GYDPs and maintain a community driven approach to their operation, as well as minimising any disruption for workers and service providers. In this regard, and in line with the overall objective of providing GYDP services to all children and young persons who require them, I am advised that the Call for Proposals will require applicants to provide for continuity of GYDP services. Furthermore, I am advised that the Call for Proposals process will facilitate existing service providers forming consortiums, which could apply to provide services under the new comprehensive approach that is being developed.

Garda Reports

298. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to publish the 2011 Garda report into the activities of undercover British police officers. [13798/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware, allegations regarding an undercover police officer in this jurisdiction were first made public in 2011.

A report was sought from the Garda Commissioner on the matter at that time and that report was provided to the then Minister for Justice and Equality, in March 2011.

The report in question was subsequently released in March 2017 consistent with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2014 and the decision of the Information Commissioner, and is now available on the Department's website.

Immigration Status

299. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress to date in the determination of an application for permission to stay in Ireland in the case of a person (details supplied); when a decision is likely to issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13809/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that, in response to a notification pursuant to the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned has not submitted written representations.

The position in the State of the person concerned will now be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and all other applicable legislation. If any representations are submitted, they will be considered before a final decision is 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.

Garda Data

300. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí based in Blanchardstown Garda station; and the number of Garda vehicles available to them in each of the past six years. [13826/18]

301. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí based in Clondalkin Garda station; and the number of Garda vehicles available to them in each of the past six years. [13827/18]

302. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the

number of gardaí based in Lucan Garda station; and the number of Garda vehicles available to them in each of the past six years. [13828/18]

303. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí based in Finglas Garda station; and the number of Garda vehicles available to them in each of the past six years. [13829/18]

304. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí assigned to DMR west division of An Garda Síochána; and the number of Garda vehicles available to them in each of the past six years. [13830/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 300 to 304, inclusive, together.

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

Blanchardstown, Finglas, Clondalkin and Lucan Garda Stations all form part of the Dublin Metropolitan Region (D.M.R) West Division. I am informed by the Commissioner that the strength D.M.R West Division on 31 January 2018, the latest date for which information is readily available, was 667. There are also 26 Garda Reserves and 53 Garda civilian staff attached to the D.M.R. West 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.

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.

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, just under 1,800 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, of whom 155 have been assigned to the D.M.R. West Division. 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 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 a further 600 Garda trainees are scheduled to attest during the remainder of 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 D.M.R. West Division.

I am advised by the Garda Commissioner that it is not possible to provide the information request regarding the number of Garda vehicles allocated by Garda station as Garda vehicles are allocated on a District basis so that they can be deployed as needed.

For the Deputy's information, I have provided in the attached document, the number of Gardaí assigned to the D.M.R. West Division and to Blanchardstown, Clondalkin, Lucan and Finglas Garda stations in each of the years from 2012 to 31 January 2018. I have also provided the number of Garda Vehicles assigned to the D.M.R. West Division and associated Districts in each of the years from 2012 to 22 March 2018, the latest date for which figures are currently available.

The number of Gardaí allocated to the D.M.R. West Division and to Blanchardstown, Finglas, Lucan and Clondalkin Garda Stations 2012 – 2018*							
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
D.M.R. West Division	744	717	699	688	673	672	667
Blanchardstown Station	162	162	156	154	143	163	161
Finglas Station	117	108	108	106	106	99	98
Lucan Station	73	72	74	73	74	70	70
Clondalkin Station	95	91	89	87	94	97	95

*Up to 31 January 2018

The number of Garda Vehicles allocated to the D.M.R. West Division 2012 – 2018*							
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Blanchardstown District	57	53	56	57	57	46	42
Lucan District	27	25	32	32	39	32	29
Clondalkin District	27	24	23	25	28	27	26
Total Vehicles D.M.R. West Division	111	102	111	114	124	105	97

*Up to 22 March 2018

Garda Strength

305. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of community gardaí based in Clondalkin Garda station in each of the past six years;

and the up to date figures for same. [13831/18]

306. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of community gardaí based in Finglas Garda station in each of the past six years; and the up to date figures for same. [13832/18]

307. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of community gardaí based in Blanchardstown Garda station in each of the past six years; and the up to date figures for same. [13833/18]

308. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of community gardaí based in Lucan Garda station in each of the past six years; and the up to date figures for same. [13834/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 305 to 308, inclusive, together.

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

I am informed by the Commissioner that the strength of Dublin Metropolitan Region (D.M.R) West Division on 31 January 2018, the latest date for which information is readily available, was 667 of whom 64 are designated as Community Garda. There are also 26 Garda Reserves and 53 Garda civilian staff attached to the D.M.R. West 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.

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.

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, just under 1,800 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide including 155 to the D.M.R. West Division. 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 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 a further 600 Garda trainees are scheduled to attest during the remainder of 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 D.M.R. West Division.

In relation to the number of “Community Gardaí “ it is important to recognise that community policing is not a specialist role in An Garda Síochána; rather it is the case that all Gardaí have a role to play in community policing in carrying out their duties. The official categorisation as a “Community Garda” simply refers to those who are exclusively assigned to building relationships with local communities including through the giving of talks to schools, community groups and others. It is a matter for the Divisional Chief Superintendent to determine the optimum distribution of duties among the personnel available to him or her having regard to the profile of the area and its specific needs.

I am assured by the Commissioner that the Garda National Model of Community Policing plays a key part in responding to crime by taking into account and responding to local conditions and needs. Overall the Model advocates a partnership based, pro-active, community-orientated style of policing. It is focused on crime prevention, problem-solving and law enforcement, with a view to building trust and enhancing the quality of life of the entire community. Clear objectives are set, such as high visibility in the community, ease of contact by members of the public, and enhanced support for crime prevention strategies.

As part of the Community Policing Model An Garda Síochána work in partnership with local communities, to prevent and deter crime through initiatives such as Neighbourhood Watch, Community Alert, Text Alert and the Garda Schools Programme as well as through more formal structures such as Joint Policing Committees.

The Community Policing Model also places a strong emphasis on Crime Prevention and within each Garda Division, where there are specialist Crime Prevention Officers (CPOs), who are trained to encourage, promote and advise on crime prevention within communities.

In addition, the National Community Policing Office, attached to the Garda Community Engagement Bureau, captures best practice in community policing initiatives and disseminates these practices through its communication network.

I have previously stated that I welcome the strong emphasis that the Commissioner’s Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016-2021 places on developing and supporting the community policing ethos of the organisation and enhancing the current delivery model so that Gardaí spend more time in the community, gaining public confidence and trust and providing a greater sense of security. It will result in the introduction of multi-skilled Community Policing Teams in every District. In terms of progress on this important initiative, I am informed that a draft Community Policing Framework which outlines the manner in which Community Policing Teams will be established has been completed and is subject to internal review before being approved by the Garda Executive for implementation.

For the Deputy’s information, I have provided in tabular form, in the attached document, the total strength and Community Gardaí strength of Blanchardstown, Lucan, Clondalkin and Finglas Garda Stations as of 31 December 2012 to 31 January 2018 the latest date for which figures are readily available, as provided by the Commissioner.

2012		
Stations	Total Strength	Of whom are Community Gardaí
Blanchardstown	162	20
Lucan	73	7

27 March 2018

Clondalkin	95	10
Finglas	117	15
2013		
Stations	Total Strength	Of whom are Community Gardaí
Blanchardstown	162	16
Lucan	72	6
Clondalkin	91	7
Finglas	108	11
2014		
Stations	Total Strength	Of whom are Community Gardaí
Blanchardstown	156	15
Lucan	74	6
Clondalkin	89	7
Finglas	108	12
2015		
Stations	Total Strength	Of whom are Community Gardaí
Blanchardstown	154	13
Lucan	73	6
Clondalkin	87	8
Finglas	106	12
2016		
Stations	Total Strength	Of whom are Community Gardaí
Blanchardstown	143	11
Lucan	74	6
Clondalkin	94	7
Finglas	106	10
2017		
Stations	Total Strength	Of whom are Community Gardaí
Blanchardstown	163	15
Lucan	70	6
Clondalkin	97	7
Finglas	99	12
2018*		
Stations	Total Strength	Of whom are Community Gardaí
Blanchardstown	161	15
Lucan	70	6
Clondalkin	95	7
Finglas	98	12

*Up to 31 January 2018

Garda Transport Data

309. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of marked and unmarked Garda cars and vans in the Dublin region that were scrapped in 2017 due to the fact they exceeded 300,000 km mileage and or exceeded ten years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13855/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will appreciate, decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda vehicles are a matter for the Garda Commissioner in light of his identified operational demands and the availability of resources. As Minister, I have no direct role in the matter.

However, I understand from the Garda authorities that the general policy in relation to the decommissioning of Garda vehicles is that, in accordance with manufacturer's recommendations, they are decommissioned when the odometer reaches 300,000 kilometres. Vehicles are also decommissioned on age grounds (usually when they reach 10 years) or as a result of collisions or when the vehicles are beyond economic repair.

I have been informed that the application of this policy has resulted in 59 cars being decommissioned in the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) in 2017, of which 8 were marked and 51 unmarked. In addition, 15 vans were decommissioned in DMR in 2017, of which 9 were marked and 6 unmarked.

Garda Vetting Applications Data

310. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda vetting applications that were submitted in 2015, 2016 and 2017; the number that were fully processed in each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13864/18]

311. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of persons that submitted multiple Garda vetting applications in respect of different organisations they were involved with which require Garda vetting in each of the years 2015 to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13865/18]

312. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if consideration has been given to reforming the Garda vetting process to remove the need for multiple applications by persons that are in a number of organisations that require Garda vetting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13866/18]

320. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to review the Garda vetting system which demands that a person working with different community groups must make separate applications; and if this system can be replaced with one overall clearance certificate which would be issued on an annual basis. [14246/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 310 to 312, inclusive, and 320 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, the primary purpose of the employment vetting carried out by the Garda National Vetting Bureau is to seek to ensure the safety of children and vulnerable adults and it is carried out by An Garda Síochána primarily in accordance with the provisions of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012-2016.

Vetting checks are conducted by the Garda National Vetting Bureau for each new vetting application received to ensure that the most recent data available is taken into account. This is because once there has been any significant lapse of time between one employment and another,

the original vetting disclosure must be reviewed to take account of any changes in information, such as more recent criminal convictions.

Furthermore, the Data Protection Acts require that any sensitive personal data which employers use in regard to their employees must be current, accurate and up-to-date. Importantly, the general non-transferability and contemporaneous nature of the current process also helps to protect against the risk of fraud or forgery in the process.

At present, 80% of overall vetting applications are being processed by the National Vetting Bureau in five working days. This efficiency has been achieved by the deployment of the e-vetting system which facilitates the on-line processing of applications for vetting from registered organisations. The e-vetting system is available to all registered organisations and I am informed that the Garda Authorities are ready to assist those organisations who are not yet using the e-vetting system to do so. In circumstances where there is such a sustained reduction in processing times, the issue of vetting “transferability” is largely obviated.

That said, there are certain limited circumstances where organisations can share a single vetting disclosure where this is agreed to by the vetting applicant. Section 12(3)(A) of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 (as amended) provides that two or more relevant organisations can enter into a joint written agreement in relation to the employment, contracting, permitting or placement of an person to undertake relevant work or activities thereby providing for only one of the organisations being required to conduct vetting in respect of that person.

Regarding the request for statistical information on vetting, I am informed by the Garda Authorities that the National Vetting Bureau does not keep statistics in respect of the number of individuals that have made multiple Garda vetting applications for different organisations.

I am further informed that the following tables provide a breakdown of the numbers of applications received and processed in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

Year	Applications Received
2017	497,026
2016	389,548
2015	349,910

Year	Applications Processed
2017	487,934
2016	360,395
2015	319,592

The Deputy may appreciate that there is a natural variance between what is received and completed as there are applications on hand at the end of each year which would have been received within the turnaround time applicable. These applications are carried over to the start of the following year.

Garda Stations

313. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of the new Garda station for Macroom; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13005/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The Deputy will appreciate that the programme of replacement and refurbishment of Garda accommodation is pro-

gressed by the Garda authorities working in close cooperation with the Office of Public Works (OPW), which has the responsibility for the provision and maintenance of Garda accommodation. As Minister, I have no direct role in the matter.

As the Deputy will be aware, the Garda Building and Refurbishment Programme 2016-2021, which is an ambitious 5 year Programme based on agreed Garda priorities, continues to benefit over thirty locations around the country. The Programme includes over €60million of Exchequer funding as well as a major Public Private Partnership (PPP) project to deliver stations at Macroom, as well as at Sligo and Clonmel.

With regard to the proposed Macroom station, I understand that the OPW has acquired a site for the station.

I further understand that the acquisition by the OPW of sites for the proposed Sligo and Clonmel stations is well advanced and, once completed, the development of the PPP bundle will be progressed under the auspices of the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA).

Court Accommodation Provision

314. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the timeframe for the roll-over from the temporary premises when the newly refurbished courthouse in County Waterford reopens; if there will be enhanced hours and services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13957/18]

315. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the District Courts in Dungarvan and Lismore, County Waterford, will continue to sit as per schedule when the newly refurbished courthouse in Waterford city reopens. [13958/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 314 and 315 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, under the provisions of the Courts Service Act 1998 management of the courts, including the provision of accommodation for court sittings, is the responsibility of the Courts Service, which is independent in exercising its functions.

However, in order to be of assistance to the Deputy, I have had enquiries made and the Courts Service has informed me that the last sitting of Waterford District Court at Grace Dieu Manor will be on Wednesday 28 March 2018 and that the newly refurbished courthouse at Catherine Street, Waterford will re-open on Wednesday 4 April 2018.

The Courts Service has also informed me that the extended and refurbished courthouse in Waterford contains six courtrooms and all the necessary associated facilities in a modern courthouse. These include waiting areas, consultation rooms, victim support facilities, jury facilities, custody facilities and facilities for court users including legal practitioners and the Gardaí. The courtrooms are also fitted for the use of courtroom technology, including digital audio recording, evidence display and video-conferencing and the building is designed and built to be universally accessible.

The Courts Service has advised that Waterford Court Office will be operating increased public open hours from 10.00am to 13.00pm and from 14.00pm to 16.30pm.

The Courts Service has further advised that the opening of the newly refurbished courthouse in Waterford will not impact on the service presently provided at the District Courts in Dungar-

van and Lismore. The current sittings will continue to sit as per schedule.

Garda Stations

316. **Deputy Brendan Ryan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when Rush Garda station will be reopened. [14037/18]

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

As the Deputy will be aware, the Programme for a Partnership Government commits to a pilot scheme to reopen 6 Garda stations, both urban and rural, to determine possible positive impacts that such openings will have on criminal activity, with special emphasis on burglaries, theft and public order.

The Garda Commissioner's final report, which is available on my Department's website, recommends that Rush Garda station be reopened, along with stations in Ballinspittle, Co. Cork, Bawnboy, Co. Cavan, Leighlinbridge, Co. Carlow, Donard, Co. Wicklow, and Stepside, Co. Dublin.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that they have provided a brief of requirements to the OPW in relation to the reopening of these Garda stations, including Rush Garda station, and requested the OPW to undertake technical surveys to determine the works required and the costs of such works to enable the stations to reopen. I understand that this process is underway.

Passport Applications

317. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of an application for a passport by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14063/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): The issuing of a passport is a matter for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and is contingent on the person being an Irish citizen. I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of my Department that the processing of the application for a certificate of naturalisation from the person referred to by the Deputy is on-going and I understand 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 straightforward cases are now 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.

Direct Provision Data

318. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 216 of 21 March 2018, the name, location and intended future use of the direct provision centre that was closed down earlier in 2018 leading to persons being transferred to other centres. [14151/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): The Reception & Integration Agency (RIA) is responsible for the provision of accommodation within its State accommodation portfolio for protection applicants while they await a decision on their claim for international protection. RIA had contracted the provision of an accommodation centre at Georgian Court, 77-79 Lower Gardiner Street, Dublin 1. This contract was due to expire on the 19th February 2018.

RIA were advised prior to the expiration of the contract that the contractor was not seeking an extension to the contract or intending to engage in any public procurement process to continue to provide accommodation services to RIA at Georgian Court beyond the 19th February 2018.

As a consequence, Georgian Court ceased providing accommodation services to RIA on the 19th February 2018 and all residents of Georgian Court who were still in the protection process were transferred to alternative accommodation within RIA's portfolio.

The future use of the premises is a matter for the owners of the property.

Garda Promotions

319. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality when the vacant position of superintendent in Nenagh, County Tipperary, will be filled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14244/18]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan): As the Deputy will be aware the distribution of personnel is a matter for the Garda Commissioner 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 overall policing arrangements and operational strategies, are continually monitored and reviewed. Such monitoring ensures that optimum use is made of Garda Resources and the best possible Garda service is provided to the general public.

Nenagh Garda District forms part of the Tipperary Division and I am advised by the Commissioner that as of the 31 January there were four Superintendents assigned to that Division.

The Deputy will be aware the Policing Authority assumed responsibility for appointments to the senior ranks of Superintendent, Chief Superintendent and Assistant Garda Commissioner on 1 January 2017.

Under Regulation 5 of Garda Síochána Act 2005 (Appointments to the Ranks of Assistant Garda Commissioner, Chief Superintendent and Superintendent) Regulations 2016 the Authority is required to keep under review the need for competitions to be held for the purpose of making appointments to the ranks concerned and to ensure that it has arrangements in place to undertake required competitions without undue delay. Regulation 5 further provides that the Garda Commissioner shall keep the Authority fully informed with regard to vacancies likely to arise.

Question No. 320 answered with Question No. 310.

Work Permits Applications

321. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the status of a work permit for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14048/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): The Employment Permits section of my Department inform me that an application for a General Employment Permit for the person concerned was received on 11 September 2017.

The application was referred for a pre-issue investigation to the Workplace Relations Commission. The application was refused on 8th February for a number of reasons, including the status of the employee in the State, the nature of business of the employer and outstanding documentation from the Revenue Commissioners.

The applicant was notified of this decision in writing and of their right to request a review of this decision within 28 days, in line with the provisions of the Employment Permits Acts. I am informed that no request for a review was received from the applicant or their authorised agent.

A refusal to grant an employment permit does not preclude an applicant from submitting another application for an employment permit. Such an application should comply with all of the legislative requirements for the particular employment permit type.

Work Permits Data

322. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the details of jobs that are categorised as highly skilled for the purposes of employment permits. [13549/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department operates a managed employment permits system which maximises the benefits of economic migration while minimising the risk of disrupting our labour market.

The Employment Permits Act 2006, as amended, sets out a requirement that regard is taken of shortages or surpluses of skills, qualifications and experience required to achieve economic and social development and competitiveness, and for the proper functioning of economic sectors.

The Act of 2006, as amended, provides for the identification of highly skilled occupations for which there is a skills demand and an ineligible occupations list for which there is an evidence that there is sufficient capacity within the Irish/EEA labour market to fill job vacancies. Every other job in the labour market where an employer cannot find a worker, may be eligible

for an employment permit subject to certain criteria.

Reviews of the Highly Skilled Eligible Occupations List (HSEOL) and the Ineligible Categories of Employment List (ICEL) are undertaken twice annually to ensure that they reflect the exigencies of a changing labour environment. Occupations designated highly skilled and on the HSEOL are eligible for Critical Skills Employment Permits.

An occupation may be considered for inclusion on the HSEOL provided that:

- There are no suitable Irish/EEA nationals available to undertake the work;
- Development opportunities for Irish/EEA nationals are not undermined;
- Genuine skills shortage exists and that it is not a recruitment or retention problem;
- The Government education, training, employment and economic development policies are supported;
- The skill shortage exists across the occupation, despite attempts by industry to train and attract Irish/EEA nationals to available jobs.

The rationale underpinning the inclusion on or omission from the lists of any particular occupation is driven by skills demands in the economy, and is based, in the first instance, on research undertaken by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs for the National Skills Council. This evidence is subsequently augmented by a public consultation process.

The current HSEOL can be viewed on my Department's website, at: <https://dbe.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Workplace-and-Skills/Employment-Permits/Employment-Permit-Eligibility/Highly-Skilled-Eligible-Occupations-List/>.

The focus of the employment permit regime in recent years has been to ensure that the skills requirement of enterprise in the State can be met through economic migration where necessary. However, as we approach full employment, labour as well as skills needs are beginning to manifest. It is imperative that the employment permits system remains correctly oriented to meet the State's emerging labour market needs, be they labour or skills shortages. Consequently, my Department is undertaking a review of our economic migration policy. I have established an Inter Departmental Group to steer the review and have requested that it report to me by the end of June 2018.

Ministerial Meetings

323. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when she will next meet the CEO of Science Foundation Ireland (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13695/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I have met with the Director General of Science Foundation Ireland, Professor Mark Ferguson, on a number of occasions since my appointment as Minister. I will meet with Professor Ferguson again in the near future although that has yet to be scheduled in my diary.

My colleague Minister John Halligan T. D., in his role as Minister of State for Training, Skills, Innovation, Research and Development meets with Professor Ferguson on a regular basis for structured dialogue on SFI issues. Two such formal meetings have taken place this year, in January and March. Another such meeting is scheduled for April.

IDA Ireland Portfolio

324. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation further to Parliamentary Question No. 112 of 25 January 2018, if IDA lands are available in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13770/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I am advised that, at present, IDA Ireland does not own any land in County Clare. However, should any new or existing clients of the Agency require a property solution in the County, the IDA's property team would provide their full support.

There is a strong base of investment in Clare with 68 IDA client companies employing a total of 6,775 people. The level of employment by FDI companies in the County has also increased by almost 12% since 2013. The IDA continues to engage with its client base to help support further employment and investment growth in Clare.

IDA Ireland Data

325. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of companies supported by the IDA in County Donegal in each of the years 2000 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form. [13775/18]

326. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of jobs at IDA-supported companies in County Donegal in each of the years 2000 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form. [13776/18]

327. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the details of companies and the number of employees at each individual company supported by the IDA in County Donegal in tabular form. [13777/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): I propose to take Questions Nos. 325 to 327, inclusive, together.

I am determined to support the growth of high-quality and sustainable employment across Ireland, including in County Donegal. Last year the number of IDA supported jobs in Donegal increased by 11%, reaching a total of 3,389. The Agency continues to work hard to create further employment opportunities in the County and to increase the number of multinational companies located there, which currently include SITA, Optibelt and Pramerica.

Employment details, such as the number of employees within individual companies, are provided to the IDA on a confidential basis by its clients as they are considered sensitive commercial information. My Department is therefore unable to release this information.

The following tables outline the employment figures for Donegal from 2000 to 2017. The figures for 2018 will not be available until my Department's Annual Employment Survey (AES) is carried out in November 2018.

-	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
1. Number of Companies	14	13	13	13	13	13	14	13
2. Total Jobs	2,739	2,574	2,640	2,287	2,206	2,101	1,563	1,623

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3. New Jobs Created (Gross Gains)	308	353	179	141	136	252	106	176
4. Job Losses	-341	-518	-113	-494	-217	-357	-644	-116
5. Additional Jobs Created (Net Change)	-33	-165	66	-353	-81	-105	-538	60

-	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
1. Number of Companies	14	14	12	12	13	13	13	12	12	12
2. Total Jobs	1,764	1,817	1,847	2,101	2,223	2,382	2,607	2,918	3,039	3,389
3. New Jobs Created (Gross Gains)	61	98	281	277	164	183	247	330	145	375
4. Job Losses	-65	-45	-251	-23	-42	-24	-22	-19	-24	-25
5. Additional Jobs Created (Net Change)	-4	53	30	254	122	159	225	311	121	350

Work Permits Data

328. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of visas granted to non-EU workers on film and television productions in receipt of State funding in each of the years 2007 to 2017. [13961/18]

Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys): My Department has responsibility for the State's employment permits regime. During the years referred to by the Deputy a total of 559 employment permits were issued under the sectoral heading of "Entertainment" which includes film and television productions. My Department does not record if the particular enterprise in which a person is employed is in receipt of State funding.

The Department of Justice and Equality has responsibility for issuing immigration permissions/visas and I am advised that they do not record the industry in which a person is employed nor whether the particular enterprise the person works in is State funded.

Permits granted to non -EU workers in the entertainment sector from 2007 – 2017

Year	Number
2007	59
2008	59
2009	37

Year	Number
2010	35
2011	18
2012	27
2013	33
2014	21
2015	40
2016	97
2017	133
TOTAL	559

Health Services

329. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if a matter (details supplied) will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13583/18]

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

Ambulance Service

330. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health the role of the ambulance service in the event that a person is reported by a member of the public as being suicidal in a public place with their life being in imminent danger; the protocols that apply; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13676/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Hospital Appointments Status

331. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will have a procedure carried out at Sligo University Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13521/18]

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 Status

332. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health when an appointment for surgery for a person (details supplied) will be made at Cappagh Hospital. [13522/18]

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.

Drugs Payment Scheme Coverage

333. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons who were receiving Versatis on the drug payment scheme and the medical card in November 2017; the number of persons removed and still receiving Versatis on these two schemes respectively; and his plans to ensure the return of this drug to persons on these schemes. [13523/18]

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

Services for People with Disabilities

334. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if a reply will issue to correspondence from a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13524/18]

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

The Programme for Partnership Government states that the Government wishes to provide

more accessible respite care to facilitate full support for people with a disability.

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

Health Services

335. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to a situation facing the family of a person (details supplied). [13526/18]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

336. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on a matter (details supplied) regarding housing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13545/18]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

337. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his plans to publish the review of the pricing system for long-term residential care facilities, as recommended within the review of the fair deal scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13546/18]

338. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce an independent appeals mechanism within fair deal to provide third party recourse for nursing home providers that cannot agree a fee with the NTPF and to bring greater transparency to the fair deal pricing mechanism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13547/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 337 and 338 together.

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.

The Report of the NHSS Review published in 2015 identified a number of issues for more

detailed consideration, including a review of pricing mechanism by the NTPF, with a view to:

- Ensuring value for money and economy, with the lowest possible administrative costs for clients and the State and administrative burden for providers;
- Increasing the transparency of the pricing mechanism so that existing and potential investors can make as informed decisions as possible; and
- Ensuring that there is adequate residential capacity for those residents with more complex needs.

A Steering Committee has been established to oversee this review which is chaired by the NTPF and includes representatives from my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The NTPF has responsibility for the development of this report, although Department Officials continue to engage with the NTPF regarding the review. The most recent update from the NTPF is that the report will be finalised and ready for review in the first half of 2018.

With regard to the Deputy's question on plans to introduce an independent appeal mechanism within the NHSS to provide third party recourse for nursing home providers that cannot agree a fee with the NTPF, I cannot nor would I wish to, prejudge the outcomes of the NTPF pricing mechanism review. However I welcome the work to date and look forward to the NTPF concluding the review later this year.

Drugs Payment Scheme Coverage

339. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health if Melatonin will be made available under the medical card scheme for children with autism spectrum disorder and attention deficit disorder; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13584/18]

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

Medical Card Applications

340. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health the calculations used in determining the assessment of a medical card application by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13591/18]

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

Hospital Car Parks

341. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide additional parking spaces in University Hospital Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13593/18]

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

HSE to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Vaccination Programme

342. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if his Department or the HSE has plans to extend the free meningitis B vaccination or provide financial support for the vaccination in respect of children born before 1 October 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13607/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The 2016 HSE Service Plan included additional funding for the expansion of the Primary Childhood Immunisation Schedule. Two changes were made to the schedule with the introduction of Meningococcal B (Men B) and Rotavirus immunisation for all babies born on or after 1 October, 2016. As the first doses of these vaccines are administered to children when they reach two months, these changes took effect from 1 December, 2016. There are no plans at this stage to introduce a catch-up programme for older children. Those who have a medical card are eligible to have the vaccine administered by their GP free of charge. However the purchase of the vaccine is not covered by the medical card scheme.

All vaccines administered through the Primary Childhood Immunisation Schedule are provided free of charge. Ireland is the second country in Europe to make the Men B vaccine available free of charge as part of its national immunisation programme.

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

343. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the position of a person (details supplied) on the waiting list for orthodontic work. [13614/18]

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

Medical Aids and Appliances Provision

344. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the time a person (details supplied) will have to wait for a wheelchair; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13674/18]

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

Primary Care Centres Provision

345. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health the status of the primary care centre for Finglas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13677/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department has asked the Health Service Executive to provide the Deputy directly with the information requested in respect of Finglas Primary Care Centre.

Blood Transfusion Service Provision

346. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide funding for mobile blood donation vans to travel to workplaces and schools in an effort to increase blood supplies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13678/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The IBTS has three fixed donation centres: D'Olier Street and Stillorgan in Dublin and St Finbar's Hospital in Cork. Mobile clinic teams travel to various locations to provide people with an opportunity to donate blood. Clinics are held in venues such as community centres, hotels, school buildings and GAA halls. Clinics are held in the afternoons and evenings in the effort to maximise donations.

The IBTS provides transport for employees to and from their fixed donation centres in Dublin and Cork under their Bloodworks initiative. The IBTS also runs clinics at some workplaces where a lot of people are employed. This provides an opportunity for staff to make a blood donation during working hours.

As blood donors must be over 18, the IBTS does not seek donations from schools. The IBTS has developed specific material to raise awareness of blood donation among students. This material is available for teachers and students on the IBTS website (www.giveblood.ie).

The Irish Blood Transfusion Service (IBTS) derives its funding from the sale of blood and blood products.

Hospital Beds Data

347. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the bed capacity at each of the community hospitals in County Donegal in each of the years 2011 to 2017 and to date in 2018; the number of bed closures which have occurred at each of these facilities during this period; the reason for each such closure; the average percentage occupancy rate experienced at each of these facilities during this period in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13687/18]

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.

Nursing Home Services

348. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when the review of the pricing system in respect of long-term residential care with service providers, and as recommended by the review of the fair deal scheme will be published; the steps being taken to develop a fit-for-purpose funding model for nursing home care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13689/18]

349. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce an appeals mechanism as part of the fair deal scheme to provide recourse for service providers unable to formally agree fees and pricing with the NTPF; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13690/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take

Questions Nos. 348 and 349 together.

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.

The Report of the NHSS Review published in 2015 identified a number of issues for more detailed consideration, including a review of pricing mechanism by the NTPF, with a view to:

- Ensuring value for money and economy, with the lowest possible administrative costs for clients and the State and administrative burden for providers;

- Increasing the transparency of the pricing mechanism so that existing and potential investors can make as informed decisions as possible; and

- Ensuring that there is adequate residential capacity for those residents with more complex needs.

A Steering Committee has been established to oversee this review which is chaired by the NTPF and includes representatives from my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The NTPF have responsibility for the development of this report, although Department Officials continue to engage with the NTPF regarding the review. The most recent update from the NTPF is that the report will be finalised and ready for review in the first half of 2018.

With regard to the Deputy's question on plans to introduce an independent appeal mechanism within the NHSS to provide third party recourse for nursing home providers that cannot agree a fee with the NTPF, I cannot nor would I wish to, prejudge the outcomes of the NTPF pricing mechanism review. However I welcome the work to date and look forward to the NTPF concluding the review later this year.

Addiction Treatment Services

350. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the facilities for drug and alcohol rehabilitation that are available for long-term inpatient care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13700/18]

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

Chronic Disease Management Programme

351. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the completion and publication of the integrated care programme for the prevention and management of chronic disease, ICPCD, model of care; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13715/18]

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

Chronic Disease Management Programme

352. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the details of the chronic disease demonstrator sites for the four main chronic diseases established under the integrated care programme for the prevention and management of chronic disease, ICPCD; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13716/18]

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

Chronic Disease Management Programme

353. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health when the detailed gap analysis for specialist ambulatory care and hospital inpatient specialist care for heart failure will be carried out by the Integrated Care Programme for the Prevention and Management of Chronic Disease (ICPCD); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13717/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Integrated Care Programme for the Prevention and Management of Chronic Disease, in partnership with the National Clinical Programme for Heart Failure, is planning to conduct a service gap analysis to inform integrated care projects to address service gaps for heart failure.

This will include specialist ambulatory care and hospital inpatient specialist care. A report on the outcome of the gap analysis is expected to be presented to the HSE Design Board by end 2018.

Chronic Disease Management Programme

354. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the details of the Integrated Care Programme for the Prevention and Management of Chronic Disease (ICPCD) 2018 programme plan; the timeframe for the activities; when population health planning data will be developed; when service gap analyses will be carried out; when the workforce plan will be developed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13718/18]

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

Hospitals Data

355. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the thrombolysis rates in each hospital providing thrombolysis here in 2016; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13719/18]

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

Hospitals Discharges

356. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the sites in which the extension

of early supported discharge is proposed for 2018; the progress to date on same; the status on the NCP's recommendation for a further nine early supported discharge teams to be established; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13720/18]

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

National Stroke Programme Implementation

357. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the areas in which stroke units are in development; the status on their development; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13721/18]

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

National Stroke Programme Implementation

358. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the development of the national stroke register into a national stroke audit; the person or body that manages the register; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13722/18]

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

Health Services Provision

359. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the challenges in terms of pathways of care, estate and manpower that need to be addressed in terms of thrombectomy as referred to by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13723/18]

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

Audiology Services Provision

360. **Deputy Lisa Chambers** asked the Minister for Health the reason a report following a review of the audiology services in the HSE west remains in draft form and has not been published; and if he will ensure prompt publication without further delay (details supplied). [13725/18]

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

Hospital Staff Data

361. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of staff employed

by Portiuncula Hospital, Ballinasloe, in each of the years 2012 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13744/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is query relates to a service matter, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Hospital Staff Data

362. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of agency staff employed by Portiuncula Hospital, Ballinasloe, in each of the years 2012 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13745/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is query relates to a service matter, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Services for People with Disabilities

363. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an application by an organisation (details supplied) for funding to provide additional services to school leavers with intellectual difficulties in County Longford will be considered in view of the lack of spaces available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13750/18]

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

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

Hospital Appointments Status

364. **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. [13760/18]

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 Beds Data

365. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Health the number of meetings he has held with the HSE regarding the 500 beds to be delivered in the winter of 2018-2019; his plans for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13765/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): One of the key recommendations of the recently published Health Service Capacity Review is that in order to reach international standards of bed occupancy levels, the acute hospital system needs additional beds frontloaded in the short term.

As a response to this, in January, I requested the HSE to prioritise the development of a plan to identify the location and mix of beds across the hospital system which can be opened and staffed this year and into 2019, to alleviate overcrowding in our hospital ED's and improve preparedness for next winter.

Since then, officials in my Department have been meeting regularly with their counterparts in the HSE on advancing the plan, and I recently received an update from the Departmental/HSE working group on progress in relation to the development of the proposals. I very regularly meet with the HSE on this and all matters to do with both scheduled and unscheduled care.

I look forward to receiving the plan, which I understand is at an advanced stage, in the coming weeks.

Services for People with Disabilities

366. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Health the status of the implementation of the Jeyes report recommendations with regard to a service (details supplied); the status of all residential and day-service units, staffing ratios, and staffing pay disputes; his plans for future alignment with additional services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13768/18]

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.

Orthodontic Services Waiting Lists

367. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health the status of a person (details sup-

plied) on the orthodontist waiting list. [13769/18]

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

Medical Card Applications

368. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a decision on a medical card application submitted in January 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13774/18]

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review

369. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health if he will publish the review of the pricing system for long-term residential care facilities as recommended within the review of the fair deal scheme in view of the fact that the pricing review was scheduled for completion on 1 June 2017 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13781/18]

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.

The Report of the NHSS Review published in 2015 identified a number of issues for more detailed consideration, including a review of pricing mechanism by the NTPF, with a view to:

- Ensuring value for money and economy, with the lowest possible administrative costs for clients and the State and administrative burden for providers;
- Increasing the transparency of the pricing mechanism so that existing and potential investors can make as informed decisions as possible; and
- Ensuring that there is adequate residential capacity for those residents with more complex needs.

A Steering Committee has been established to oversee this review which is chaired by the NTPF and includes representatives from the Department of Health and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

The NTPF have responsibility for the development of this report, although Department Officials continue to engage with the NTPF regarding the review. The most recent update from the NTPF is that the report will be finalised and ready for review in the first half of 2018.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review

370. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce an inde-

pendent appeals mechanism within fair deal to provide third-party recourse for nursing home providers that cannot agree a fee with the NTPF and to bring greater transparency to the fair deal pricing mechanism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13782/18]

371. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the reason the four HSE nursing homes operating within County Tipperary are paid fees that are on average 65% above those payable to the 25 private and voluntary nursing homes operating within County Tipperary; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13783/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 370 and 371 together.

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.

The Report of the NHSS Review published in 2015 identified a number of issues for more detailed consideration, including a review of pricing mechanism by the NTPF, with a view to:

- Ensuring value for money and economy, with the lowest possible administrative costs for clients and the State and administrative burden for providers;
- Increasing the transparency of the pricing mechanism so that existing and potential investors can make as informed decisions as possible; and
- Ensuring that there is adequate residential capacity for those residents with more complex needs.

A Steering Committee has been established to oversee this review which is chaired by the NTPF and includes representatives from my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The NTPF have responsibility for the development of this report, although Department Officials continue to engage with the NTPF regarding the review. The most recent update from the NTPF is that the report will be finalised and ready for review in the first half of 2018.

With regard to the Deputy's question on plans to introduce an independent appeal mechanism within the NHSS to provide third party recourse for nursing home providers that cannot agree a fee with the NTPF, I cannot nor would I wish to, prejudge the outcomes of the NTPF pricing mechanism review. However I welcome the work to date and look forward to the NTPF concluding the review later this year.

In relation to variations in the cost of care for public and private nursing homes it is acknowledged that public nursing homes have, in general, a higher cost of care. It is understood that a number of factors contribute to this such as; higher dependency levels of clients requiring a higher staff skill mix, environmental implications for staffing levels and the geographical provision of residential placements.

That said, there is a need to undertake a deeper analysis of the factors driving the higher costs of care in public units. This is why the 2015 Review of the Nursing Homes Support Scheme identified the need for a Value for Money and Policy (VFM) review of the cost differentials in public and private/voluntary residential facilities.

The aim of this review is to identify and analyse these factors. The VFM review will also

make recommendations on how the differentials can be addressed. This review has recently commenced and is being led by my Department.

Mental Health Services

372. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) that presented multiple times at both Blanchardstown and Naas hospitals with suicidal ideation over the course of six days recently was refused admission by Blanchardstown hospital three times and by Naas hospital twice; the reason the person was only admitted to a psychiatric lockdown after six days had elapsed and three suicide attempts had been made; the reason for the delay in their admission; the resources and support which should have been made available to them but were not; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13791/18]

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.

Maternity Services

373. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health when he expects a decision will issue by the South-South West Hospital Group regarding approval of a capital submission for a dedicated obstetric theatre for University Hospital Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13792/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): 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 as soon as possible.

Hospital Appointments Status

374. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive a hospital appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13793/18]

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

375. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an application for a medical card by a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [13803/18]

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

Mental Health Services Data

376. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of children presenting to emergency departments for mental health issues in each of the years 2015, 2016 and 2017; the number of these presentations that led to admissions in each year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13804/18]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Review

377. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Health if the immediate publication of the review of pricing system for long-term residential care facilities as recommended within the review of the fair deal scheme will be made; his plans for the introduction of an independent appeals mechanism within the scheme to provide third-party recourse for nursing home providers that cannot agree a fee with the NTPF; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13805/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): The Report the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (NHSS) Review published in 2015 identified a number of issues for more detailed consideration, including a review of pricing mechanism by the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF), with a view to:

- Ensuring value for money and economy, with the lowest possible administrative costs for clients and the State and administrative burden for providers;
- Increasing the transparency of the pricing mechanism so that existing and potential investors can make as informed decisions as possible; and
- Ensuring that there is adequate residential capacity for those residents with more complex needs.

A Steering Committee has been established to oversee this review which is chaired by the NTPF and includes representatives my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

The NTPF have responsibility for the development of this report, although Department Officials continue to engage with the NTPF regarding the review. The most recent update from the NTPF is that the report will be finalised and ready for review in the first half of 2018.

With regard to the Deputy's question on plans to introduce an independent appeal mechanism within the NHSS to provide third party recourse for nursing home providers that cannot

agree a fee with the NTPF, I cannot nor would I wish to, prejudge the outcomes of the NTPF pricing mechanism review. However I welcome the work to date and look forward to the NTPF concluding the review later this year.

Medicinal Products Availability

378. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health when the result of the assessment of the PKU treatment drug Kuvan will be made available; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13807/18]

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

Family Resource Centres

379. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Health if a timescale has been put in place to provide a written commitment from the HSE on the capital cost of renovations to a centre (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13808/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department has asked the Health Service Executive to provide the Deputy directly with the information requested in respect of Skibbereen Community and Family Resource Centre.

Mental Health Services Provision

380. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 50 of 15 November 2017, when the new 50-bed mental health unit at University Hospital Galway will be operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13810/18]

381. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 50 of 15 November 2017, the reason for the delay in opening the new 50-bed mental health unit at University Hospital Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13811/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 380 and 381 together.

As these are service matters I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

382. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Health the changes and the timeline for changes to the fair deal scheme regarding the treatment of family farms in the financial assessment of the application process; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13814/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): My Department has

been advancing work on this matter and having regard for this complex issue and for the sensitivities of the Scheme 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 received this advice and is exploring the legislative changes necessary and any potential impacts as a result of amending the scheme. A Memo for Government on this issue will be brought forward shortly and subject to Government approval and the drafting process, I then hope to bring forward these legislative proposals thereafter.

Health and Social Care Professionals

383. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to concerns expressed by members of an organisation (details supplied); if he has received correspondence on same; if he has received meeting requests from members the organisation on this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13839/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I have met with Athletic Rehabilitation Therapists Ireland, as have my officials, on a number of previous occasions regarding their concerns in respect of the designation of the profession of Physiotherapist for regulation by CORU under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005.

Athletic rehabilitation therapists are a separate profession to that of Physiotherapist. As a separate profession they do not use and are not seeking to use or practice under the title physiotherapist /physical therapist and there is no risk of confusion in the public mind with regard to the services of those practising under the title athletic rehabilitation therapist.

I have assured the ARTI on a number of occasions that once work concludes on the regulation of the professions currently designated under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act, 2005, CORU will be requested to undertake a risk assessment of a number of other professions seeking regulation by CORU, including Athletic Rehabilitation Therapists, and to make recommendations to me in this regard.

Health and Social Care Professionals

384. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the status of the assessment to be undertaken by CORU on the professions seeking regulation including athletic rehabilitation therapists; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13840/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As I have stated previously in the House, once work concludes on the regulation of the professions designated under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005, CORU will be requested to undertake a risk assessment of a number of other professions seeking regulation, including Athletic Rehabilitation Therapists, and to make recommendations to me in this regard.

On the 21 March 2018, the Oireachtas approved the designation of counsellor and psychotherapist under the Act, increasing to sixteen the number of professions regulated by CORU. Taking into account this additional statutory responsibility and the extensive work programme underway on concluding the regulation of professions already designated, the risk assessment will be undertaken by CORU as soon as is practicable.

Hospital Appointments Status

385. **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. [13853/18]

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.

Dental Services Staff

386. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if funding will be allocated for two extra full-time dental hygienists for a health centre (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13854/18]

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

Home Care Packages Data

387. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health the number of approved home care package scheme applications waiting allocation of carers by local health office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13867/18]

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.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme

388. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if he will publish the review of the pricing system for long-term residential care facilities; if he will introduce an independent appeals process within the fair deal scheme to provide third party recourse for nursing home providers that fail to agree a fee with the NTPF and in an effort to bring greater transparency to the fair deal pricing mechanism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13871/18]

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.

The Report of the NHSS Review published in 2015 identified a number of issues for more detailed consideration, including a review of pricing mechanism by the NTPF, with a view to:

- Ensuring value for money and economy, with the lowest possible administrative costs for clients and the State and administrative burden for providers;

- Increasing the transparency of the pricing mechanism so that existing and potential investors can make as informed decisions as possible; and

- Ensuring that there is adequate residential capacity for those residents with more complex needs.

A Steering Committee has been established to oversee this review which is chaired by the NTPF and includes representatives from my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The NTPF has responsibility for the development of this report, although Department Officials continue to engage with the NTPF regarding the review. The most recent update from the NTPF is that the report will be finalised and ready for review in the first half of 2018.

With regard to the Deputy's question on plans to introduce an independent appeal mechanism within the NHSS to provide third party recourse for nursing home providers that cannot agree a fee with the NTPF, I cannot nor would I wish to, prejudge the outcomes of the NTPF pricing mechanism review. However I welcome the work to date and look forward to the NTPF concluding the review later this year.

General Practitioner Services Provision

389. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number of areas in County Wexford that do not have a general practitioner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13873/18]

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.

Services for People with Disabilities

390. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) whose medical services are being moved to a different part of the county will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13876/18]

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.

Proposed Legislation

391. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the status of the human tissue Bill. [13877/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Government approved the preparation of a General Scheme and Heads of a Human Tissue Bill last year. The proposed legislation will include provisions on:

- organ donation and transplantation;
- post-mortem practices;
- anatomical examination/education and training; and
- public display of bodies after death.

Work on drafting the General Scheme is progressing and it is proposed to seek Government approval to publish, and to progress the drafting of the Human Tissue Bill, in the coming months.

Nursing Home Services

392. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health the status of the provision of a new residential nursing care unit at Merlin Park Hospital; when a planning application will be lodged for a new facility; when construction of this new facility will commence; the number of long-stay patients that will be catered for in this unit; if there will be a dedicated Alzheimer's unit at this facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13878/18]

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.

Medicinal Products Availability

393. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to provide access to a treatment (details supplied) through the HSE for spinal muscular atrophy; if a child that has type two spinal muscular atrophy can have access to testing under way here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13903/18]

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

Mental Health Services Funding

394. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 322 of 3 October 2017, if the attention of the HSE staff management has been drawn to the way in which it can request to draw down funds previously returned to the HSE unspent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13904/18]

395. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 322 of 3 October 2017, the length of time a request has been made to reclaim funds previously returned unspent; the number of requests granted; the number of requests refused; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13905/18]

396. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 322 of 3 October 2017, if when health areas return funds allocated for mental health services in a given year; their allocation for the ensuing financial year remains unchanged, increased or decreased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13906/18]

397. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 322 of 3 October 2017, the reason funds were returned; if mental health services were directed to return funds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13907/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 394 to 397, inclusive, together.

As these are service matters I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

Health Services

398. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the reason the body with responsibility for the creation of surgical and medical procedure codes in private medicine have not kept them up to date and as a result have created additional costs and expenses for private medical subscribers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13911/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): There is no specific body with responsibility for the creation of surgical and medical procedure codes in private medicine. Each of the commercial health insurers provide their own Schedule of Benefits, which outline the professional services provided by them for all medical, surgical and diagnostic procedures and tests for inpatient and day cases and include the relevant surgical procedural code which applies to each.

In public hospitals, Diagnosis Related Group (DRG) systems classify patients into distinct groupings that are clinically similar and consume similar health resources. The AR-DRG (Australian refined DRG) grouping system is used to group each hospital's inpatient and daycase workload, including surgical and medical work, into approximately 1,050 DRGs. This system is overseen by the Healthcare Pricing Office within the HSE, and is used for the purposes of Activity Based Funding in public hospitals. The system is not used in private hospitals currently, and private health insurance claims in public hospitals are not made on this basis.

Medicinal Products Prices

399. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if the HSE has followed his re-

quest to re-engage with a company (details supplied) in relation to the provision of Respreeza; if not, the reason for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13913/18]

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

The HSE carefully considered the pricing and reimbursement of human alpha1-proteinase inhibitor (Respreeza). The manufacturer, CSL Behring, was notified in August 2017 that the HSE was unable to recommend reimbursement. The HSE concluded that there was not enough evidence to suggest that patients would derive a clinically meaningful benefit from this treatment and that the current price was not a cost effective use of resources.

A number of patients were on an access scheme for this product, operated by the manufacturer, for the treatment of Alpha-1 deficiency. This scheme was being run independently by the manufacturer without reference to the HSE.

Late last year the company decided to terminate the access scheme. Following interventions by the HSE, the company modified its decision and agreed to continue to supply the medication free of charge for the patients on the access scheme for a further six months, or until the next clinical trial commences in mid 2018, but stipulated that it would not cover the cost of administering the medicine.

Due to the critical and exceptional circumstances, the HSE decided to facilitate a transitional arrangement, under which it would fund the necessary nursing service to ensure that patients would continue to receive the medicine until a new clinical trial commences in 2018. The terms of this transitional arrangement, under which the HSE has agreed to fund the administration of the drug, include a requirement that the lead clinician (who is the patients' treating consultant) ensures that appropriate alternative treatment regimes are put in place in good time for those patients not proceeding onto the next trial.

The HSE is liaising with the treating consultant and the pharmaceutical company in relation to the longer term care of this group of patients and in order to ensure that appropriate care arrangements are in place for each patient in advance of an anticipated further clinical trial which is expected to begin later in 2018.

The HSE has asked that the plan for the longer term care of this group of patients would be finalised without delay.

This transitional arrangement does not alter the reimbursement decision of the HSE in relation to Respreeza.

The HSE has advised the company that it is willing to undertake a timely review of any new application for reimbursement.

Disabilities Assessments

400. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Health the waiting time for an assessment of need for a person (details supplied); the efforts being made to reduce the waiting time in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13914/18]

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.

Medicinal Products Regulation

401. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the guidelines in place in relation to the sale of medicines containing codeine. [13955/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Codeine is a mild to moderate opioid (narcotic) analgesic which, due to its potential for misuse, is a controlled drug under the Misuse of Drugs legislation.

As an analgesic, codeine is most often used in combination with other analgesics such as paracetamol or ibuprofen and is currently authorised in Ireland in such non-prescription products for pain relief. It is also available in single ingredient, non-prescription products, as a cough suppressant. These authorised products are available without a prescription through retail pharmacy businesses (pharmacies) only.

The Pharmacy Act 2007 and the Regulation of Retail Pharmacy Businesses Regulations 2008 require that all medicines supplied through a pharmacy must be supplied by or under the personal supervision of a pharmacist and that all non-prescription medicines supplied must be the subject of appropriate counselling.

The Pharmacy regulator, the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI) issued guidance to pharmacists on the safe supply of non-prescription products containing codeine in 2010. This Guidance was updated in 2015 and most recently in October 2017. The Guidance covers the requirements set out above and in addition contains further restrictions which apply to the supply of codeine based products.

These restrictions include a requirement that codeine based products are not available to the public for self-selection and should only be supplied when a pharmacist deems such a supply to be necessary and only when a non-opioid analgesic, e.g. paracetamol, aspirin or ibuprofen, has not proven sufficient to relieve the patient's symptoms. The Guidance also states that codeine medicines should be used for the shortest time possible and for no longer than three days without medical supervision. Pharmacists must also ensure that patients are advised of the importance of adhering to the recommended dosage and duration of use as well as the risks associated with overdose and or/prolonged use. Patients should also be counselled in respect of potential adverse reactions or side effects.

The full Guidance document, along with information on current legislative requirements, is available on the PSI website: http://thepsi.ie/Libraries/Folder_Pharmacy_Practice_Guidance/01_3_Safe_supply_of_Codeine_to_patients.sflb.ashx.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Appeals

402. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Health when a fair deal scheme appeal

by a person (details supplied) will be decided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13956/18]

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.

Medical Card Applications

403. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health when a medical card application by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal will be processed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13962/18]

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

Orthodontic Services Provision

404. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive orthodontic treatment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13965/18]

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

Mental Health Services Data

405. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the number and type of community mental health teams in each CHO area in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13972/18]

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

Health Services Data

406. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the types and number of different testing methodologies for borreliosis being employed here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13973/18]

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

Disabilities Assessments

407. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if an assessment of needs for a person (details supplied) will be reviewed; the timeframe for same; and if an early appointment will be provided. [13975/18]

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.

Disabilities Assessments

408. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health if a full evaluation and provision of care and support services will be provided to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13978/18]

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.

Respite Care Services Provision

409. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) who has been granted extra days of respite care per month is still waiting three months after they were granted same due to the funding not being drawn down by the HSE in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13985/18]

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

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

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

Medical Qualifications

410. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the progress which has been made to establish a recognised standard of training for practitioners of acupuncture (details supplied); if academic validation of training programmes in this field by QQI is in place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13987/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The academic validation of training programmes in this field by QQI is a matter for QQI.

In September 2010, HETAC (now QQI) and the Department of Health jointly commissioned an International Review of the Academic Validation of Higher Education Programmes in the Complementary Therapies. It focused on five fields, including acupuncture, herbal medicine and traditional Chinese medicine, in jurisdictions which have national education frameworks comparable to the Bologna framework (an EU quality assurance system in education based on learning outcomes) and aimed to identify criteria for the identification of complementary therapies which have the academic and professional maturity to warrant the academic validation of programmes by HETAC/QQI. A draft report was published on the HETAC website in late 2012 to which stakeholders were invited to respond.

The research project was managed by HETAC. My Department participated because, where the academic validation of a training programme is in place, it might arise that such academic standards might be deemed as the entry level standards to the practice of a profession by systems of either statutory or voluntary regulation.

Since then, the immediate priority of my Department, within the field of professional regulation, has been the full implementation of the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005. This designates fourteen professions for statutory regulation, and this month the Oireachtas approved the designation as well, in the public interest, of the professions of counsellor and psychotherapist which further extends the implementation period being worked towards.

Health Services Provision

411. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) was informed on 7 February 2018 that the HSE will not provide additional items for their medical equipment. [13988/18]

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

HSE Funding

412. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health further to correspondence (details supplied), if his Department has released the full €35 million of funding for developments to the HSE for 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13991/18]

413. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health further to correspondence (details supplied), the way in which the €35 million of funding for developments which was due to be released to the HSE has been spent; the measures this funding was spent on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13992/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 412 and 413 together.

Funding from my Department will be part of the HSE normal drawdown across the year and is available to the HSE when 2018 new development projects require the funding. The HSE expects to have drawn down €10 Million by the end of Quarter 1, 2018.

I have referred the remainder of the question to the HSE for further input.

Mental Health Services Data

414. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health further to correspondence (details supplied), the number of sites without seven over seven mental health supports; the locations involved; the number of staff recruited to provide seven over seven mental health supports since 11 January 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13993/18]

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.

Legislative Measures

415. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health when the general scheme of a Bill reflecting the 165 changes recommended by the expert group review of the Mental Health Act 2001 will be made available; the Departmental resources dedicated to the progress of this Bill; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13994/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): An Expert Group Review of the Mental Health Act 2001 was published in 2015. There are 165 recommendations contained in the review and most of these relate to amendments to the Mental Health Act. The changes are progressive in nature and first and foremost seek to move away from the often paternalistic interpretation of the existing legislation to one where, insofar as is possible, the individual has the final say in what he/she deems to be in his/her best interests.

The previous Government granted approval for the preparation of a general scheme of a bill to reflect the recommendations of the review in revised mental health legislation. Work is ongoing on this comprehensive updating of our mental health legislation and the draft heads are expected to be significantly progressed by end of Q3 2018, at which point consultation with the Mental Health Commission will take place. It is essential that the Mental Health Commission, which has a very significant and important role in overseeing the safeguards provided in the Act, have full input into the framing of the many amendments to be included in revised mental health legislation.

There is a full time resource within the Department working entirely on mental health legislation and incorporating the recommendations of the Expert Group Review is a key priority for the Department's Mental Health Unit. Following a recent staff appointment to the Unit, it has been possible to reallocate the workload in the Unit so as to allow key staff focus solely on legislation.

Hospital Services

416. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health when he will undertake the consultation he committed to in December 2017 with local interested parties on the future of the

emergency department in Portlaoise hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13997/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): It remains the case, as outlined at my meeting with you and the other Laois Oireachtas Members in December 2017, that no decision has been made yet on the draft Action Plan for Portlaoise Hospital. I have asked my Department to conduct a consultation process in this regard involving local clinicians and the community and this is currently under consideration.

Hospital Services

417. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the progress the HSE has made with establishing the project group representing all stakeholders to develop the plan for Abbey-leix Hospital, County Laois; when this group will meet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13998/18]

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.

Disease Incidence

418. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Health the number of samples submitted for testing for Lyme borrelia for each of the years 2007 to 2017 and to date in 2018, by county in tabular form; the number which returned positive results, long-standing positive results and an equivocal result, respectively; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14001/18]

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

Hospitals Capital Programme

419. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Health if capital investment is planned for the laundry department of Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital; his views on whether the facilities and equipment of the laundry department need improvement and investment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14004/18]

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

Hospital Accommodation Provision

420. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the status of the refurbishment works at Kanturk Community Hospital, Kanturk, County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14036/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): My Department has asked the Health Service Executive to provide the Deputy directly with the information requested in respect of Kanturk Community Hospital, Cork.

Medical Card Eligibility

421. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the progress to date in the determination of eligibility for a medical card in the case of persons (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14047/18]

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

Hospital Accommodation Provision

422. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for the opening of pre and post lung transplant rooms at the Mater Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14055/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Deputy's questions relate to service delivery matters and accordingly I have asked the HSE to respond directly to him.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

423. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the timeframe for increasing the number of cystic fibrosis beds at Beaumont Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14056/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Programme for Partnership Government contains a Government commitment regarding the development of a dedicated Cystic Fibrosis (CF) Unit in Beaumont Hospital, to be progressed in the context of a CF Model of Care.

This CF Unit capital project will thus be underpinned by the "Model of Care for People with Cystic Fibrosis in Ireland" which is being developed by the National Clinical Programme for Cystic Fibrosis (NCPCF). The Model of Care will set out standards and requirements for the physical and human resources to be provided for treatment of cystic fibrosis patients from a national perspective.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform governs the processes surrounding the development of healthcare projects by way of guidelines, principally the Public Spending Code. Further rigour is demanded by, and set out in, relevant EU Directives. All proposed projects must be submitted to the HSE's Capital and Property Steering Committee for approval and prioritisation prior to inclusion in its multi-annual Capital Plans. In terms of the progression of the CF Unit capital project I am happy to confirm that it has been included in the National Planning Framework under Project Ireland 2040, as well as being recommended for inclusion in the capital plan by the HSE National Capital Steering Committee.

Public Health Policy

424. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the public health guidelines that exist in relation to the maximum number of hours different children should spend playing computer games; the way in which these are publicised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14058/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): While there are currently no specific public health guidelines in relation to the maximum hours that children should spend playing computer games, some general guidance is provided by the HSE and others to parents on this issue. This includes general guidance given through the new public awareness campaign promoting healthy weight in children called START.

This campaign was developed by my Department in collaboration with the HSE and safe-food and provides information, advice and tips to inspire, empower and support parents to start building and persist with healthy lifestyle habits in the family to prevent childhood obesity. The key messages of the campaign, available at www.makeastart.ie, include guidance around healthy eating, physical activity, sleep and limiting screen time.

In terms of screen time, it is recommended that children in general should aim for less than 2 hours screen time (TV or computer) a day and zero screen time is recommended for children under 2 years.

Hospital Appointments Status

425. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will receive notification of their appointment in the Mater Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14059/18]

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.

General Practitioner Services

426. **Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick** asked the Minister for Health the reason general practitioners are accepting patients for just six months at the request that they allocate themselves another general practitioner within the six month timeframe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14060/18]

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.

Hospitals Building Programme

427. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the progress which has been made towards the construction of the south Donegal community hospital project, Ballyshannon; when a contractor will be appointed; and when work will commence on this project. [14065/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): My Department has asked the Health Service Executive to provide the Deputy directly with the information requested in respect of the project at Ballyshannon.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

428. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the amount which has been allocated in 2018 for the construction of the new mental health unit at Sligo University Hospital. [14066/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): My Department has asked the Health Service Executive to provide the Deputy directly with the information requested in respect of Sligo University Hospital.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

429. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the amount which has been allocated in 2018 towards the redevelopment of the surgical ward block at Sligo University Hospital. [14067/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): My Department has asked the Health Service Executive to provide the Deputy directly with the information requested in respect of Sligo University Hospital.

Hospital Accommodation Provision

430. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Health the progress which has been made towards the provision of a catheterisation laboratory at Sligo University Hospital. [14068/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service issue, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Emergency Departments Waiting Times

431. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health the average time from registration to discharge for all patients presenting at the accident and emergency department in University Hospital Galway; the average waiting time from registration to discharge for patients presenting with minor injuries at the department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14070/18]

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

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Administration

432. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for Health when changes to cap the financial contribution that can be applied on family farms under the fair deal nursing home scheme will be introduced following the passing of a motion in Dáil Éireann on 1 June 2017; the timeframe for the implementation of this change; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14071/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): My Department has been advancing work on this matter and having regard for this complex issue and for the sensitivities of the Scheme 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 received this advice and is exploring the legislative changes necessary and any potential impacts as a result of amending the scheme. A Memo for Government on this issue will be brought forward shortly and subject to Government approval and the drafting process, I then hope to bring forward these legislative proposals thereafter.

Charitable and Voluntary Organisations

433. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Health if core funding will be made available to an association (details supplied) for its helpline, its advocacy work and to support its branch structure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14076/18]

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 a service issue, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Health Services Provision

434. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Health his plans to establish nationwide Parkinson's nurse specialist service and surgical service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14077/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The Model of Care for Neurology was launched by the Director General of the HSE in late 2016. This was developed by the HSE's National Clinical Programme for Neurology in collaboration with consultants, nurses, health and social care professionals and patient support groups. It aims to address the need for strategic development of neurology services in the provision of better care for these patients. This year, funding has been allocated by the HSE to commence development of peri- and post-operative services to support patients with Parkinson's Disease receiving Deep Brain Stimulation.

In relation to the particular queries raised, as these are service matters, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

Health Services Provision

435. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health if care and rehabilitation will be provided for a person (details supplied) at the National Rehabilitation Hospital, Dún Laoghaire; and if the matter will be expedited. [14101/18]

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 a service issue, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

Disability Support Services

436. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the way in which the accounts of persons at a centre (details supplied) in County Kilkenny are managed; if weekend allowances are paid to the persons or family members when weekend home visits are arranged, from the persons' accounts; the person or body that has access to the accounts; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14104/18]

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.

Medicinal Products

437. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the role and function of the protein biologics in yeast, the yeast manufacturing process used extensively in the production of Gardasil by a company (details supplied); if these proteins cause a cross reaction with the AML1 and myelin which lead to unexplained adverse reactions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14108/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): The information that the Deputy seeks is not readily available. Therefore, I have asked the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) to investigate the matter and reply directly to the Deputy.

Psychological Services

438. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the reason there are no adult psychological services in CHO areas (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [14118/18]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

439. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has been waiting for an orthopaedic outpatient appointment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14125/18]

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 Administration

440. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if a review has been conducted of procedures for issuing medical cards to persons with cancer as per the programme for Government; and if so, the findings and recommendations of the review. [14127/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the Deputy is aware the Programme for Government states that the Clinical Advisory Group on Medical Cards will examine the guidelines for the awarding of discretionary medical cards for patients undergoing treatment for cancer.

As the group was established by reports to the HSE, I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the HSE for direct reply.

Drugs Payment Scheme Data

441. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the number of pharmacists that made late applications for payment for medical card prescriptions for 2008, 2009 and 2010; and the number of these claims approved, disapproved and outstanding in tabular form. [14128/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of

Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Drugs Payment Scheme Administration

442. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the procedure whereby pharmacists making late claims for payment of medical card prescriptions have their claims dealt with. [14129/18]

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

Drugs Payment Scheme Administration

443. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if there are outstanding claims for pharmacies for payment of prescriptions for 2008. [14130/18]

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

Drugs Payment Scheme Administration

444. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if there are outstanding claims for pharmacies for payment of prescriptions for 2009. [14131/18]

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

Drugs Payment Scheme Administration

445. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health if there are outstanding claims for pharmacies for payment of prescriptions for 2010. [14132/18]

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

Hospital Waiting Lists

446. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) is waiting to get a scoliosis operation in Cappagh Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14135/18]

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.

Disability Services Provision

447. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health the monitoring or accountability of services in place for persons with intellectual disabilities that attend day services in training centres or day centres; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14143/18]

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 Services

448. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if a matter (details supplied) will be examined and addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14171/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As this is a service matter relating to the HSE's safeguarding structures it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Hospital Services

449. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of scheduled inpatient procedures cancelled or postponed to date in 2018. [14179/18]

450. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Health the number of scheduled day case procedures cancelled or postponed to date in 2018. [14180/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): I propose to take Questions Nos. 449 and 450 together.

In relation to the particular query raised, I have asked the HSE to provide the information sought by the Deputy and I will forward this information to him as soon as it is available.

Nursing Homes Support Scheme Administration

451. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health if the publication of the review of the pricing system for long-term residential care facilities will be ensured as recommended within the review of the fair deal scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14227/18]

452. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce an independent appeals mechanism within the fair deal scheme to provide third-party recourse for nursing home providers that cannot agree a fee with the NTPF and in order to ensure there is greater transparency to the fair deal pricing mechanism; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14228/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 451 and 452 together.

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.

The Report of the NHSS Review published in 2015 identified a number of issues for more detailed consideration, including a review of pricing mechanism by the NTPF, with a view to:

- Ensuring value for money and economy, with the lowest possible administrative costs for clients and the State and administrative burden for providers;
- Increasing the transparency of the pricing mechanism so that existing and potential investors can make as informed decisions as possible; and
- Ensuring that there is adequate residential capacity for those residents with more complex needs.

A Steering Committee has been established to oversee this review which is chaired by the NTPF and includes representatives from my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The NTPF has responsibility for the development of this report, although Department Officials continue to engage with the NTPF regarding the review. The most recent update from the NTPF is that the report will be finalised and ready for review in the first half of 2018.

With regard to the Deputy's question on plans to introduce an independent appeal mechanism within the NHSS to provide third party recourse for nursing home providers that cannot agree a fee with the NTPF, I cannot, nor would I wish to, prejudge the outcomes of the NTPF pricing mechanism review. However I welcome the work to date and look forward to the NTPF

concluding the review later this year.

Home Care Packages Administration

453. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the eligibility for a home care package in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14245/18]

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.

Medical Card Eligibility

454. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) has been refused a medical card; if this case can now be reviewed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14250/18]

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

Hospitals Building Programme

455. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health the status of the new diabetes centre at Sligo University Hospital; if the shortlisting of contractors has been completed; when a contractor will be appointed; when funding will be approved thereafter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14251/18]

Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris): As the queries raised by the Deputy relate to a service issue, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

Agriculture Scheme Penalties

456. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a reduced penalty will be applied in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13585/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): A report detailing findings of an inspection carried out by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) on 12th June 2017 was referred to my Department's Cross-Compliance Unit for attention. This report detailed breaches relating to the cross-compliance requirements under SMR 3 - Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Flora and Fauna.

The breaches identified related to damage caused to an area of land designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) as a result of the clearing and reclamation of land. These works were carried out without the permission of NPWS.

The breaches resulted in a 20% penalty being applied against the 2017 Direct Schemes payments. The person named was notified of the decision on 13th December 2017, which took

account of correspondence submitted by the person named in November 2017.

The person named subsequently sought a review of this decision, the outcome of which was to up-hold the original inspection findings. The person named was notified of this outcome on 9th March 2018.

If the person named is dissatisfied with this outcome, the decision can be appealed to the independent Agriculture Appeals Office, within 3 months.

Agriculture Scheme Appeals

457. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the action he plans to take on foot of a decision on an appeal lodged by a farmer (details supplied) in County Galway; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13608/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department notes the decision of the Agriculture Appeals Office in this case and is working now to give full effect to the appeal outcome.

Tuberculosis Eradication Programme Administration

458. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13611/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Following an epidemiological assessment, my Department's veterinary inspectorate concluded that the original outbreak of TB in this herd was most likely due to infection in the local wildlife. The more recent outbreak of TB in this herd is considered to most likely be due to residual infection in the herd. Department personnel are in on-going contact with the herdowner named with a view to eradicating TB from his herd as soon as possible. Currently laboratory results are awaited for one animal. If the laboratory results are negative, only one further test will be required to de-restrict the herd.

Agriculture Scheme Data

459. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons who applied to the crop loss compensation scheme by county; the number of approved applicants; the number of applicants who withdrew from the scheme; the number per county who have been issued payments to date, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13675/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The crop loss support measure was launched in July to assist growers most affected by the wet weather harvest conditions of September 2016. A total of 167 applications were received under the measure.

Payments under the measure totalling €337,596.30 have been issued to 75 applicants. In a number of cases, further information or clarification is required in order to fully process applications. In all of these cases, the applicants have been contacted directly by an official from my Department. As the further information requested is received, these cases will be examined

again and subsequent pay runs will be put in place as more case are cleared for payment.

The figures requested on a county basis are set out in the table.

County	Number of Applicants	Paid	Withdrawn
Cork	86	32	1
Donegal	25	11	0
Galway	23	12	0
Kerry	7	3	0
Kilkenny	1	1	0
Longford	4	4	0
Louth	2	0	0
Mayo	4	2	0
Meath	1	1	0
Roscommon	7	2	0
Tipperary	4	4	0
Waterford	1	1	0
Wexford	2	2	0
	167	75	1

GLAS Payments

460. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the second payment under the GLAS will be paid (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13729/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The 85% GLAS 2017 advance payments commenced on schedule in November 2017. Payments continue to issue on a weekly basis to participants as they become eligible and cases are cleared for payment. The target date for the commencement of the 15% GLAS 2017 balancing payments is May 2018.

Pesticide Use

461. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the European Commission's Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food, and Feed will meet in March 2018 to discuss a report from the European Food Safety Authority regarding the dangers that neonicotinoid pesticides pose to native bee populations; and his views regarding the banning of neonicotinoid pesticides, such as clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiamethoxam, in advance of this meeting. [13752/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) updated its risk assessments of the neonicotinoid substances clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiamethoxam recently, publishing its revised assessments on 28 February 2018. These assessments are a comprehensive evaluation, rigorously peer reviewed by Member State experts, of all relevant scientific information that has become available since 2013. EFSA's conclusions were discussed at the Standing Committee (Pesticide Legislation) meeting on 22-23 March 2018.

These assessments will be further discussed at the Standing Committee and this process, when concluded, will include the normal tabling of a formal commission proposal for vote by Member States on authorisation. In determining its position with regard to any vote, and as occurs with all chemical authorisation, my Department will give careful consideration to the wording of any Commission proposal tabled and its reflection of the detailed scientific risk assessments carried out by EFSA. Ireland is mindful of the need for a very high level of protection for bees.

Foreshore Licence Applications

462. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if foreshore licences or other licences have been issued for Lough Foyle in the history of the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13759/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department does not issue foreshore licences or aquaculture licences in respect of Lough Foyle. As the Deputy is aware, 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 a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Foreshore licensing, other than that related to fisheries and aquaculture, is a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government.

The Deputy will also be aware that 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 to the complex jurisdictional issues involved.

GLAS Payments

463. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 398 of 8 March 2018, when a person (details supplied) will receive a GLAS payment for 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13766/18]

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

Administrative checks involving a number of sections within the Department take place on all GLAS claims. As stated in the reply to the previous Parliamentary Question on this matter all cases must clear these administrative checks before payment can issue. My Department is making every effort to complete the checks required and once this case clears validations the 2017, advance payment will be made. GLAS payments are continuing to issue on a weekly basis.

Organic Farming Scheme Payments

464. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine

further to Parliamentary Question No. 399 of 8 March 2018, when a person (details supplied) will receive an organics payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13767/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named is a participant in the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS). Prior to payment all participants are subject to validation checks which must be passed before payment can issue, and this includes ensuring that there is no double-funding of actions between OFS and GLAS. In this case the applicant's 2017 GLAS payment has not been finalised and therefore what is due under his OFS payment cannot be confirmed. My Department is working to resolve this case as quickly as possible.

Organic Farming Scheme Payments

465. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will receive an organics payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13771/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named is a participant in the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS). Prior to payment all participants are subject to validation checks which must be passed before payment can issue, and this includes ensuring that there is no double-funding of actions between OFS and GLAS. In this case the applicant's 2017 GLAS payment has not been finalised and therefore what is due under his OFS payment cannot be confirmed. My Department is working to resolve this issue as quickly as possible.

GLAS Payments

466. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a person (details supplied) will receive a GLAS payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13772/18]

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 2016.

The Department is aware of an issue with this case that resulted in the 2017 advance payment not being made. A solution has been identified and work is underway to resolve the case. Once implemented the 2017 advance payment will issue. GLAS payments continue to issue on a weekly basis.

Basic Payment Scheme Appeals

467. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a decision will be made on a basic payment scheme appeal by a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13806/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department actively investigates incidents of illegal burning as the lands affected are deemed ineligible for the purposes of the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS).

As part of this process, the person named was notified by my Department in relation to burned land that formed part of their BPS application, and has submitted an appeal in relation to this matter.

The processing of this appeal is currently being finalised, and a decision in this matter will be communicated directly to the person named shortly.

Herd Number Applications

468. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application for a herd number by a person (details supplied). [13851/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application for a herd number was received from the above named on 14 March 2017. An on-farm inspection was carried out on 21 March 2017. At this inspection the applicant was informed of the requirement to supply documentation supporting the application including a lease agreement for the land and farm buildings subject to the application. Furthermore a cattle crush required upgrading. The applicant agreed to contact the inspecting officer when this work was completed and lease agreements were put in place. The inspecting officer has contacted the applicant or their nominated contact on a number of occasions in 2017 with a view to progressing the application. To date valid lease agreements have not been furnished to support the application and therefore the application cannot be further processed.

Transport of Animals

469. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the assurances that will be provided to ensure that calves exported to the EU mainland receive adequate rest, food and water throughout their journey; if an investigation is being carried out on the 108 calves killed in the recent crash in the Netherlands; the improvements that will be made to prevent this from recurring; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13893/18]

470. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the animal welfare standards for calves transported on the temporary ship brought in to replace a ship (details supplied) to transport calves to France following reports that three of four drivers could not be accommodated on this replacement vessel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13894/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 469 and 470 together.

Council Regulation (EC) No. 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport and related operations lays down the requirements and conditions for the transport of live animals, including bovines, undertaken in connection with an economic activity, and the related operations of handling, loading and unloading. The Regulation is given effect in national legislation by the European Communities (Animal Transport and Control Post) Regulations 2006. (Statutory Instrument No. 675 of 2006). Live exports are an important component of Ireland's livestock industry and my Department promotes an environment in which live exports take place with a strong emphasis on the welfare of all animals being exported. A considerable amount of resources is deployed to the process of certifying animals for export and in ensuring compliance in respect of the welfare of the animals being exported. My Department is regularly in contact with the Competent Authorities in other Member States through which live animals pass en

route to their final destination. The purpose of these contacts is to ensure that the regulations in place regarding rest, feed and water are obeyed regardless of the location of the animals or the transport vehicle or vessel. For instance, where transporters are suspected of failing to obey the regulations on the protection of live animals during transport in Ireland or other Member States, there is a system in place for official notifications to the Member State of origin of the journey and the Member State where the transporter is authorised. Any such official notifications are investigated and where there are non-compliances appropriate sanctions are applied to the transporters and organisers of the journey. In terms of the issue raised concerning the export of calves on a replacement ship, there are strict arrangements in place with the shipping companies engaged in transporting animals, to ensure adequate oversight of the animals when in transit. My Department is satisfied that these arrangements are working in a satisfactory manner and that the welfare of the calves is not compromised.

With regard to the incident leading to the death of calves in the Netherlands, this appears to result from an unfortunate road traffic accident. The Dutch authorities are investigating the circumstances of the accident.

My Department will continue to promote and maintain an environment in which live exports can continue in both an economic and sustainable manner and with due regard for the welfare of all animals exported.

Animal Welfare

471. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of cows and calves killed at a location (details supplied) during Storm Emma; the recommendations he will make in relation to such sites funded by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13895/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Teagasc are involved in 4 demonstration farms with industry partners to highlight best practice in livestock production in terms of animal breeding, grassland management, animal health and financial management. Teagasc provide strategic oversight in the form of business planning and technical support and also organise farm walks and visits etc. My Department does not directly aid the operation of these farms.

The Greenfield Dairy Farm project was set up in 2010 to demonstrate best practise in the design, construction and operation of sustainable grass based milk production systems to Irish dairy farmers. Glanbia, the Agricultural Trust and the farm owners, formed a limited company (Greenfield Dairy Partners Limited), which leased the farm from the owners for a 15-year period. Teagasc are not involved in the day-to-day operations on the farm.

Like many other farms, Greenfield was impacted by the extreme weather associated with Storm Emma. Farm staff stayed on the farm for the entire duration of the storm to monitor the stock under the adverse conditions. Additional help was brought in to ensure that all animals were provided with adequate feed and water, which is the main animal welfare priority in such situations.

Out of a total of 370 cows, there were 290 cows on the farm during the storm. In preparation for the storm, approximately 80 in-calf cows and 30 calves were moved to a nearby farmyard which provided more sheltered accommodation. Unfortunately over the 24-hour period, five calves and two cows died due to the adverse effects of Storm Emma; an additional calf died in the following 24-hours.

Teagasc regrets the animal deaths that occurred, but faced with the large snowfall and drifting, are satisfied that everything that was humanly possible was done to alleviate the situation. Over the last 8 years, Greenfield has had a very good animal welfare record with cow and calf mortality, one of the key performance indicators that is recorded and reported weekly, significantly below national average rates.

While an event such as Storm Emma is unlikely to be repeated during the lifetime of this project, Teagasc in association with its stakeholders will carry out a thorough review of the event. This will include a review of the farm infrastructure and recommendations as to how such adverse events are prepared for and alleviated in the future. Teagasc will also prepare a specific set of guidelines to help farmers to cope with extreme adverse events such as occurred with Storm Emma and Storm Ophelia.

Sheep Welfare Scheme

472. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the second payment of the sheep welfare scheme will be made available to recipients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13964/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In line with the relevant EU Regulations, the advance payment under the Sheep Welfare Scheme commenced in November 2017. The advance payment rate was increased to 85% following discussion with the EU Commission, and total payments of some €16m have issued.

The issue of the 15% balancing payments to all eligible participants in the Sheep Welfare Scheme is scheduled to commence in the second quarter of 2018.

GLAS Payments

473. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a GLAS payment for a person (details supplied); when a payment will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14041/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): All GLAS payments are up to date in this case.

Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme

474. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a TAMS payment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14042/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The applicant in question submitted a claim under the Animal Welfare, Safety and Nutrient Storage Scheme of TAMS II. This file is being processed at present and a number of required checks are being carried out before payment is finalised. It is anticipated that these will be completed in the very near future.

GLAS Payments

475. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of a 2017 GLAS payment for person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14043/18]

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

Administrative checks involving a number of sections within the Department take place on all GLAS claims. All cases must clear validation checks before payment can issue. Department officials are working proactively to complete the checks in this case. Once this case clears validations the 2017 advance payment will be made. GLAS payments are being made on a weekly basis.

Organic Farming Scheme Payments

476. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of organic farming payments for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14044/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The person named is a participant in the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS). However, an issue relating to separate applications to join both GLAS 2 and 3 created difficulties with processing his payment for Organics. This has now been resolved with the withdrawal of his application for GLAS 2, and work on processing his payments under OFS is currently under way.

Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Payments

477. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) received a reduced rate of ANC payment in 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14062/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): An application in respect of the 2015 Basic Payment and Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme was received from the person named on 29 May 2015. On his application he declared an eligible area of 5.16 hectares of land and was paid accordingly.

Subsequent to this application, the person named submitted a request to have additional lands included in the application. This request is currently under review and an official from my Department will be in direct contact with the person named to clarify the position.

Afforestation Programme

478. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the results of the mid-term review of the forestry programme 2014-2020 promised at the end of 2017 will be published; if no forestry financial approvals are taking place pending its publication; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14064/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The proposals contained in the Midterm Review of the Forestry Programme were adopted by Government

on 20 February 2018 and a copy of the review is now available on my Department's website. Financial approvals are being issued and the new higher rates introduced as part of the Midterm Review apply.

Aquaculture Licence Applications

479. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of an application for an oyster fishing licence by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14083/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The applications for two aquaculture licences referred to by the Deputy are in respect of two sites located in Castlemaine Harbour, which is designated as a Special Area of Conservation under the EU Habitats Directive and a Special Protection Area under the EU Birds Directive (Natura 2000 sites).

All applications in 'Natura 2000' areas are required to be appropriately assessed for the purpose of environmental compliance with the EU Birds and Habitats Directives. Castlemaine Harbour was one of the first bays to be appropriately assessed in 2011 and the relevant licensing determinations were made based on applications to hand at the time of the assessment.

The specific applications referred to by the Deputy were submitted to my Department subsequent to the carrying out of the Appropriate Assessment process for the harbour. These applications will be appropriately assessed in the second Appropriate Assessment Report for Castlemaine Harbour which is currently underway. My Department will consider these applications and all other applications in the Harbour once this Report has been completed.

Every effort is being made to expedite the conclusion of this matter as soon as possible.

Animal Identification Schemes

480. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to introduce an option on a form (details supplied) under the rules for the movement of animals to bed and breakfast accommodation for compliance for the movement of cattle to enable persons to indicate that the next movement of animals is back to the original herd owner; if a computerised system is in place to enable online recording of such movements; and if not, his plans for such a system. [14084/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The bovine traceability system is operated in accordance with EU regulatory requirements whereby movements from holding to holding are recorded on a computer database. Under the Animal Identification and Movement (AIM) system, herd keepers are required to obtain the appropriate Certificate of Compliance approving the movement of bovine animals from one holding to another holding for any reason, and which includes to/from another holding for feeding purposes such as bed and breakfast or feedlot operations. The application system allows herd keepers to apply for Certificates of Compliance either manually or online.

The current facility to record "feedlot movements" on AIM was introduced many years ago solely to assist in the establishment of stocking density for premia payments that is no longer applicable and therefore this movement type is no longer required. My Department is currently examining the removal of this "for feeding" option when applying for a Certificate of Compli-

ance and a consultation process is underway.

Under EU Regulation No. 1760 /2000 as amended, my Department is required to record herd keepers details and movement from holding to holding. The legal position is clear in relation to the parameters for managing a database for traceability purposes and the AIM system records movements from holding to holding and has no remit with regard to ownership of bovine animals.

Departmental Staff Data

481. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of vacant positions in the BPS section of his Department; the number of persons that transferred out of the section in 2016, 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14086/18]

482. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons employed in the BPS section of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14087/18]

483. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of vacant positions in the ANC section of his Department; the number of persons that transferred out of the section in 2016, 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14088/18]

484. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons employed in the ANC section of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14089/18]

485. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of vacant positions in the AEOS section of his Department; the number of persons that transferred out of the section in 2016, 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14090/18]

486. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons employed in the AEOS section of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14091/18]

487. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of vacant positions in the beef genomic section of his Department; the number of persons that transferred out of the section in 2016, 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14092/18]

488. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons employed in the beef genomic section of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14093/18]

489. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of vacant positions in the GLAS section of his Department; the number of persons that transferred out of the section in 2016, 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14094/18]

490. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons employed in the GLAS section of his Department; and if he will

make a statement on the matter. [14095/18]

491. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of vacant positions in the knowledge transfer section of his Department; the number persons that transferred out of the section in 2016, 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14096/18]

492. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of vacant positions in the entitlements section of his Department; the number of persons that transferred out of the section in 2016, 2017 and 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14098/18]

493. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons employed in the entitlements section of his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14099/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): I propose to take Questions Nos. 481 to 493, inclusive, together.

My Department avails of the Workforce Planning processes to identify the critical resource needs required to deliver our business goals. Workforce Planning is a key tool in enabling my Department to forecast its current and future staffing needs. The Workforce Plan aims to ensure a long-term, proactive and strategic plan by which my Department achieves the right level of talent in each location and Division at the right time. My Department operates in a rapidly changing environment and its structure must facilitate the flexibility to deploy resources as the need arises.

As business needs arise, staff are allocated to various Divisions within my Department. Overall staffing levels within Divisions are continually monitored and staff transfer in and out of Divisions as the workload demands. While Divisions have staffing levels, individual sections do not, and with regard to the work areas mentioned in these questions, I am satisfied that adequate staffing levels have been maintained in these areas to provide excellent service and quality results to the customers we serve.

TB Eradication Scheme

494. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a claim for compensation by a person (details supplied) will be re-examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14100/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The On Farm Market Valuation Scheme is the principal compensation measure available to Herdowners whose herds are affected by disease under the TB Eradication Scheme.

Compensation is set at the market value of animals (i.e. the equivalent price which might reasonably be obtained for the animal at the time of determination of compensation, from a purchaser in an open market, if the animal were not affected by TB) subject to certain limits.

The pregnancy status of an animal has a bearing on valuation prices and where appropriate Valuers are required to record an in-calf and not in-calf market value for each animal. Following post mortem at the factory, where a pregnancy has been confirmed, the herdowner is paid the appropriate in-calf rate therefore compensated for the loss of the calf.

Subject to the Herdowner meeting the eligibility conditions, my Department also pays Income Supplement, Depopulation and Hardship Grants. For the purpose of income supplement dairy cows are defined as those cows listed at the breakdown test or heifers which become cows immediately prior to the breakdown test and have their calves registered within 27 days of the test date.

In this case at the time of the breakdown test the animals were classified as heifers and therefore they cannot be considered as cows for the purposes of income supplement.

GLAS Payments

495. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when a farmer (details supplied) in County Mayo will receive a GLAS payment; the reason the processing of the farmer's application has been delayed; if the application will be expedited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14110/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): The above named was approved into GLAS 1 with a contract commencement date of 1st October 2015 and has received all payments in respect of the 2015 and 2016 scheme year.

The Department is aware of an issue with this case that resulted in the 2017 advance payment not being made. A solution has been identified and is scheduled for implementation shortly. It is expected that the payment will then issue. GLAS 2017 payments are continuing to issue on a weekly basis.

Basic Payment Scheme Appeals

496. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a farm penalty was imposed on a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14121/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): Under the terms and conditions of the Basic Payment/Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme, an applicant as well as meeting scheme criteria, must comply with the EU regulatory requirements relating to Cross Compliance.

The 2016 Scheme Year application of the person named was selected for a Full Cross Compliance inspection, which includes checks across a range of Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs) and Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC).

This inspection identified breaches relating to Bovine Identification and Registration, Nitrates and Pesticides requirements, resulting in a final penalty of 5% being applied against the 2016 Direct Payments. The person named was notified of the decisions by letters dated 1st and 21st February 2017.

The person named sought a review of this decision and the outcome was to uphold the original inspection decision. The person named was notified of this outcome on 11th July 2017.

The Agriculture Appeals Office have advised my Department that the person named was offered an oral hearing and the hearing was held on 10th November 2017. In the course of that hearing it was necessary to have an adjournment. The hearing will be reconvened and the Appeals Office will be in contact with the person named.

Basic Payment Scheme Payments

497. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason there was a reduction of BPS payments due to a farmer (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14226/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): In submitting an application to participate in the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP), applicants undertake to adhere to the Terms and Conditions that govern the Programme. In certain instances non compliance with the Terms and Conditions may result in disqualification from the BDGP and the recovery of any payments already made under the Programme.

In this instance the applicant named did not comply with the Bovine Viral Diarrhoea virus (BVD) requirements of the Programme and was disqualified from further participation resulting in an overpayment amounting to €1924.10. The applicant named subsequently sought a review of the decision to disqualify him from the BDGP, and this was successful. However in the interim the overpayment was deducted from his BPS payment. The matter will be rectified immediately and any payment now due will issue shortly.

Basic Payment Scheme Appeals

498. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of farm payments for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14248/18]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed): My Department actively investigates incidents of illegal burning as the lands affected are deemed ineligible for the purposes of the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS).

As part of this process, the person named was notified by my Department in relation to burned land that formed part of their BPS application, and has submitted an appeal in relation to this matter.

The processing of this appeal is currently being finalised, and a decision in this matter will be communicated directly to the person named shortly.

Deontais Ranna

499. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** den Aire Cumarsáide, Gníomhaithe ar son na hAeráide agus Comhshaoil ó tharla go bhfuil ar dhaoine táillí bruscair a íoc de réir meáchain anois, cé na socruithe atá curtha ar bun chun cúnaimh a thabhairt do dhaoine a bhfuil táillí móra bruscair orthu de bharr seanaoise nó tinnis; agus an ndéanfaidh sé ráiteas ina thaobh. [13681/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): I gcomhréir leis na gealltanais atá leagtha amach in *A Resource Opportunity - Waste Management Policy in Ireland*, a foilsíodh in 2012, agus ar mhaithe le hathchúrsáil and cosc ar an ndramhaíl a spreagadh, sa tréimhse idir Fómhar 2017 agus Fómhar 2018 beidh deireadh á chur leis an ráta comhréidh do dhramhaíl tí a bhailítear ag colbha an chosáin, de réir mar a athnuaitear conarthaí custaiméara. Rinneadh na bearta rialála is gá le héifeacht a thabhairt don bheart seo.

Mar a bhaineann sé le teaghlaigh a bhfuil dramhaíl tí acu á bailiú ag colbha an chosáin, is fiú a lua nach beart ‘nua’ é don leath díobh a bhfuil praghasphlean dreasaithe acu cheana, i.e. plean a chuireann rogha ar fáil idir táille in aghaidh an ardaithe nó táille de réir meáchain.

Mar a fógraíodh i lár na bliana 2017, ní thabharfar isteach ‘íoc de réir an mheáchain’, is é sin táillí éigeantach in aghaidh an chileagraim. Trí raon muirir a chur ar fáil, beidh sealbhóirí tí spreagtha chun a gcuid bruscair a dheighilt agus a laghdú, agus beidh deis ag bailitheoirí dramhaíola tairiscintí éagsúla ar phraghsanna seirbhíse a fhorbairt a bheidh oiriúnach d’imthosca teaghlaigh éagsúla. Dá bharr sin, ní roghnóidh sealbhóirí tí áirithe an táille cileagraim shimplí le haghaidh bailiúchán dramhaíola. Ina áit sin, roghnóidh sealbhóirí tí áirithe táille ‘in aghaidh an ardaithe’ nó ‘de réir meáchain’ lena tseirbhís bhailiúcháin.

Tabharfar fóirdheontas bliantúil de €75 isteach chomh luath agus is féidir i mbliana, agus cuirfear é ar fáil do dhaoine a bhfuil neamhchoinneálacht leighis saoil nó fhadtéarmach orthu. Cabhróidh sé seo le daoine an meánchostas bliantúil a bhaineann le hearraí don neamhchoinneálacht a dhiúscairt a íoc. Tá an Roinn seo agam i mbun plé leis an Roinn Sláinte agus leis an bhFeidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte d’fhonn sonraí agus socruithe an fhóirdheontais a thabhairt chun críche chomh luath agus is féidir, tar éis dul i gcomhairle leis na páirtithe leasmhara.

Inland Fisheries Stocks

500. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will address issues with regard to the salmon quota for an angling club (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13817/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Seán Kyne): IFI manages salmon stocks on an individual river basis as each of Ireland’s 147 salmon rivers (including river sections and estuaries) has its own genetically unique stock of salmon.

IFI is supported in its management role by the independent Standing Scientific Committee (SSC), comprising scientists from a range of organisations. Scientific and management assessments of each of the distinct stocks are carried out every year with IFI engaged in extensive stock monitoring which feeds into the SSC’s annual reviews.

The SSC uses catch returns to individual rivers (rod catch, catch and release and any commercial catch) over the previous five years along with a rod exploitation rate to estimate the total salmon returns in each of the previous five years. An exploitation rate is applied to raise the recorded rod catch to an estimate of the total salmon stock in the river as catch statistics account for a proportion of the river’s stock..

I am advised by IFI that the mid-point (most likely) rod exploitation rate is used for the Roughty at 10% with a minimum of 5% and a maximum of 15%. Were the medium exploitation rate used for the Roughty, this would predict a much lower salmon stock and therefore a lower surplus available.

The wetted area of Irish salmon rivers was first estimated in 2003 when the wetted area of Roughty was 86.9 hectares of accessible wetted area for salmon. The estimation of salmon habitat was scientifically revised in 2012, and the revised wetted area for the Roughty was 95.2 hectares of which 81.3 hectares were accessible to salmon. River specific salmon data in relation to egg deposition is used to calculate each river’s individual conservation limit.

Other factors in relation to the make-up of each river’s individual stock also impact the

conservation limit. When compared to the Bandon, the lower average weight of one sea winter salmon on the Roughty combined with a lower proportion of large salmon (multi-sea-winter fish) results in a greater salmon egg requirement /m² and therefore a higher salmon conservation limit for the Roughty river than if conservation limit was based solely on wetted area.

As each salmon river has its own genetically unique stock and the component parts of the stock vary, the issue of establishing a conservation limit can be complex. In that regard, I will provide a detailed account of the methodologies for calculating wetted area and establishing conservation limits, including scientific references, for the Deputy.

Air Pollution

501. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the air pollution standards which currently apply; the EU air pollution regulations; the EU air pollution regulations that are not part of Irish air pollution standards; his plans to update air pollution standards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13692/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): EU Directives set down air quality standards for Ireland and the other EU Member States for a wide variety of pollutants. Ireland has transposed all EU Directives relating to air quality. The Ambient Air Quality and Cleaner Air for Europe (CAFE) Directive (2008/50/EC) was published in May 2008, and was transposed into Irish legislation by the Air Quality Standards Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 180 of 2011), as amended. In addition, Directive 2004/107/EC (relating to arsenic, cadmium, mercury, nickel and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons in ambient air) was transposed into Irish legislation by the Arsenic, Cadmium, Mercury, Nickel and Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons in Ambient Air Regulations 2009 (S.I. No. 58 of 2009), as amended. The limit values set out in these pieces of legislation are available online at the following link:

<http://www.epa.ie/air/quality/standards/>

The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) most recent annual Air Quality Report was published in November 2017 and provides an assessment of air quality in Ireland for 2016 and goes into detail about how the results compare to the European standards. Values for all network sites were below the EU annual limit value, but exceeded the stricter World Health Organisation guideline values for a number of pollutants at individual sites. The report can be found at the following link:

<http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/air/quality/epairqualityreport2016.html>

The 7th European Action Programme includes the objective of ensuring that outdoor air quality in the EU will have improved significantly by 2020, moving closer to World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines. This is an ambition which Ireland shares.

In parallel with the requirements of the CAFE Directive, Ireland is subject to, and compliant with, the National Emission Ceilings Directive (NEC) Directive 2001/81/EC, which was transposed into Irish law by S.I. No. 303/2012 - European Communities (National Emissions Ceiling) (Amendment) Regulations 2012. The NEC Directive sets upper limits, or "ceilings" for national emissions from each EU Member State. The pollutants covered include sulphur dioxide (SO₂), nitrogen oxides (NO_x), volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and ammonia (NH₃).

These targets are set out in the European Communities (National Emission Ceilings) Regulations 2004, which are available online at the following link:

<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2004/si/10/made/en/print>

A revised NEC Directive (Directive 216/2284) is due to be transposed later this year and sets stricter targets for 2020 and 2030, while also including fine particulate matter (PM2.5).

In support of these pieces of legislation which set air pollution standards, there are numerous Directives and Regulations, such as the Industrial Emissions Directive (Directive 2010/75/EU), the Medium Combustion Plants Directive (Directive EU/2015/2193), the Paints Directive (Directive 2004/42/CE) and the Non-Road Mobile Machinery Regulation (Regulation EU/2016/1628), which impose limits on emissions from various sources.

In recognition of the fact that air pollution has greater impact on health at lower levels than was previously understood, I am preparing to launch Ireland's first ever National Clean Air Strategy, which will provide the strategic policy framework to identify and promote the required integrated measures across Government to reduce air pollution and promote cleaner air, while also delivering on wider social and economic objectives.

An important part of the strategy will be an expansion of the current air quality monitoring network. The new national Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Programme (AAMP) is being developed by the EPA under section 65 of the EPA Act, 1992 as amended. One of the key objectives of the programme is to enhance the provision of real time air quality data to the public. The AAMP will double the number of ambient air quality monitoring stations in Ireland by 2022, and enhance the provision of real time air quality data to the public. Further details on the timeframes for the expansion of the network will be released as they become available. I fully support this important initiative, and have committed funding of some €5 million over the lifetime of the programme.

Broadband Service Provision

502. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the length of time residents living in rural amber areas of Tallaght and Rathfarnham will be waiting for the roll-out of broadband services. [13754/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today, almost 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. This will increase to nearly 8 out of 10 premises by the end of this year and by 2020, 9 out of 10 premises will have access to a high speed broadband connection. This is being achieved via a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention. Premises in the AMBER area on my Department's High Speed Broadband Map, available at www.broadband.gov.ie, including those in Tallaght and Rathfarnham, are included in the State Intervention Area under the NBP.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. That procurement process is now in its final stages. Current estimates for rollout indicate the majority of premises in the State intervention area will have access to a high speed broadband connection within 3 years of the beginning of rollout. My Department will also engage with the bidder to ensure the most efficient network deployment as part of the contract.

In the interim, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in re-

spect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

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

Broadband Service Provision

503. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the broadband access to a small business in a location (details supplied) in County Cork; when fibre optic broadband will be accessible to a person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13763/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today, almost 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. This will increase to nearly 8 out of 10 premises by the end of this year and by 2020, 9 out of 10 premises will have access to a high speed broadband connection. This is being achieved via a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention. The premise referred to by the Deputy is represented by way of an AMBER dot within a BLUE area on my Department's High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. A high speed broadband service will therefore be delivered through the NBP State Intervention. This premise was one of approximately 84,500 premises reclassified as AMBER when the Map was updated in April 2017. This was due to commercial operator plans for the area not materialising. As a result high speed broadband services will now be delivered to the premises through the State led intervention under the NBP.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. That procurement process is now in its final stages.

My Department's technical team has also carried out a desktop cellular path study in respect of the particular premises referred to by the Deputy which shows that there is a clear line of sight from the premise to a mast sited at Curraheen Stadium which is located 1.2 km from the premises. This mast is utilised by 3 retail mobile service operators. The various antennae on the mast should be capable of providing 4G (LTE) from one or all of the mobile service providers. Individuals can check with mobile operators regarding mobile services on offer. This may improve their connectivity in the interim period until the State led intervention delivers the future proofed solution directly to the premises.

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

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of

these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. There is a link to a list of these local Broadband Officers on my Department's website.

Broadband Service Provision

504. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the timeframe for high speed broadband in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13784/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today, almost 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. This will increase to nearly 8 out of 10 premises by the end of this year and by 2020, 9 out of 10 premises will have access to a high speed broadband connection. This is being achieved via a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention. The premise referred to by the Deputy is in an AMBER area on my Department's High Speed Broadband Map, which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. It is therefore included in the State Intervention Area under the NBP.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. That procurement process is now in its final stages.

When the procurement process reaches a satisfactory conclusion and a subsidy level has been approved by Government, a contract will be awarded and the network rollout will commence. My Department will also engage with the bidder to ensure the most efficient network deployment as part of the contract.

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

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

Waste Management

505. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the roles, responsibilities and powers of the National Waste Collection Permit Office; if the Office has enforcement powers to ensure that all permitted requirements are being observed in relation to the contract between a person and their chosen waste collector; the process by which a person can request the office to take enforcement action against a waste collector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13799/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The National Waste Collection Permit Office (NWCPO) administers the waste collection permitting system centrally on behalf of all local authorities in the State; the enforcement of the conditions attached to an individual Waste Collection Permit remains a matter for the relevant local authority.

Subject to some minor exceptions, Section 34 of the Waste Management Act requires all bodies involved in the collection of waste to have this activity authorised by a waste collection permit. Besides the legal obligation to be in possession of a valid permit, the holder also has to abide by its conditions.

In circumstances where an operator does not comply with the conditions of their permit the operator is liable to having their waste collection permit reviewed by the NWCPO, a process whereby an apparent breach of a waste collection permit condition is investigated. The review process allows the NWCPO to amend the permit, including removing the authorisation for non-compliant vehicles to collect household waste, to direct measures to be taken within a specified timeframe to ensure compliance, or to ultimately revoke the permit. This review process requires engagement and consultation with local authorities, as the enforcement of the conditions attached to an individual Waste Collection Permit remains a matter for the relevant local authority.

Contracts between waste management companies and customers are matters for those companies and their customers, subject to compliance with all applicable environmental and other relevant legislation, including contract and consumer legislation. The terms and conditions of consumer contracts do not fall within my remit as Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. The responsibility for enforcing domestic competition and consumer protection legislation lies with the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC).

It is my understanding that the CCPC has worked with the waste sector to try to ensure operators' terms and conditions are transparent and do not contain any unfair terms. The CCPC also offers useful advice for householders entering new contracts available to download at <https://www.ccpc.ie/consumers/contracts-and-services/waste-collection/>.

Similarly, the CCPC has produced a guide for household waste collectors to make operators aware that the service provided is a commercial practice and, as such, is subject to a number of laws, available to download at <https://www.ccpc.ie/business/help-for-business/guidelines-for-business/domestic-waste-collection-sector/>.

Air Pollution

506. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the body that has responsibility to protect the public from air pollution from domestic chimneys; if a complaint can be made to the local authority, the EPA or another body; the measures that can be taken to ensure compliance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13909/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Section 24(2) of the Air Pollution Act, 1987, stipulates that an occupier of any premises must not cause or permit a chimney emission in such a quantity, or in such a manner, as to be a nuisance. Section 26 of the same Act gives the Local Authority powers to serve a notice on the occupier of any premises from which there is an emission, where it appears necessary in order to prevent or to limit air pollution. It is a matter for the Local Authority to

exercise its judgement in any individual case as to whether a nuisance is being caused, and if so, what abatement action is required. In circumstances where a complaint has been made to the relevant Local Authority and the complainant is not satisfied with the action taken by that Authority, a further complaint can be made to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA will review the Local Authority's performance and assist where possible. The EPA will not become involved until the relevant Local Authority has first been given an opportunity to investigate the complaint. Information on how to make an environmental complaint has been prepared by the EPA and can be viewed on the EPA website, www.epa.ie/enforcement/report/.

Electric Vehicles

507. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which persons in counties Sligo and Leitrim can be expected to consider changing from diesel and petrol vehicles to electric vehicles in view of the limited number of working charging points available in the north west region together with the ESB's stated inability (details supplied) to repair and fix its charging units which it has introduced under the pilot scheme that are now no longer working to the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13910/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The vast majority of EV charging happens at home, which aligns with both technology and patterns of use of vehicles. In terms of the number and extent of publicly accessible charging, the National Policy Framework on the Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport in Ireland: 2017 to 2030 notes that Ireland's current EV charging network infrastructure is ahead of current market demand. However, it is recognised that the future development of the EV public charging does need to progress alongside the growth of electric vehicles.

The existing fleet of public chargers was rolled out by the ESB, through its eCars programme, and there are approximately 900 EV charge points in Ireland of which circa 70 are rapid chargers. A map showing the charge points, including the status and availability of the charge points, is available on the ESB's website at www.esb.ie/ecars. The operation and repair of these charge points are operational matters for the ESB.

The Commission for Regulation of Utilities published its independent regulatory decision in relation to the future ownership of the EV charging infrastructure in October 2017, determining that in keeping with EU provisions, the charging network should not form part of the regulated asset base and therefore expansions of the network should not be funded from network charges. The decision envisages the continued ownership of the charging network by ESB Networks for a transitional period of up to ten years, ensuring no short to medium term impact on the electric vehicle charging infrastructure and allows the ESB to continue to provide electric vehicle charging across Ireland.

The decision also set out the need for the electric vehicle charging infrastructure to operate on a commercial basis. In the absence of State-led support, this is unlikely to happen in the near term. Funding has, therefore, been allocated in my Department's budget this year to support the provision of public charging, with a particular focus on increasing the number of rapid chargers on key national routes.

To support home charging, I introduced the Electric Vehicle Home Charger Grant scheme this year. This Scheme, which came into operation on 1 January 2018, supports the cost of installing a home charger up to a maximum of €600 for buyers of both new and second-hand EVs.

Departmental Funding

508. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the level of funding provided by his Department to the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland; the number of staff employed by the authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13976/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) was established by the Broadcasting Act 2009 as the independent regulator for the broadcasting industry.

The operation of the BAI is financed by industry levy. The total levy collected in 2016 from broadcasters was €4.87m and the Authority had a staff complement of 35. Further details about the operations of the BAI including levy and staffing is available in the Authority's Annual Reports which are published on the BAI website at www.bai.ie.

The BAI also operates the Broadcasting Fund which is funded by 7% of net licence fee receipts. The fund received €13.6m in 2016 and €14m in 2017 from licence fee receipts. The fund is used to finance the Sound and Vision and Archiving Schemes. Further details about the Broadcasting Fund and the projects supported are available on the BAI website.

Internet Safety

509. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the creation of a digital safety commissioner will be approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14046/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): The Deputy will be aware that on Thursday 22 February 2018 the Government did not oppose a Private Members Bill introduced by Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire which sought to establish an office of a Digital Safety Commissioner. While many of the objectives of Deputy Ó Laoghaire's Bill are laudable, some of the proposed functions of the Office as set out in the Bill raise serious legal and jurisdictional issues.

On 21 November 2017, I convened a meeting with my colleagues the Minister for Justice and Equality and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to progress the subject of digital safety for all citizens, especially children. It was agreed at that meeting that an Open Policy Debate would be the most appropriate way to progress the issue and ensure a coherent cross departmental Government approach.

On 8 March 2018, I hosted this debate at the Royal Hospital Kilmainham which was opened by An Taoiseach. Over 120 representatives from a range of stakeholders participated, including NGOs, industry, parents' groups and young people. The event was supported by five other Ministers and organised in conjunction with the Department of Justice and Equality; Education and Skills; Health; Business Enterprise and Innovation; Children and Youth Affairs.

An Taoiseach announced that the Government would, by June of this year, prepare an action plan on online safety. My Department will actively contribute to the preparation of that plan, and a report on the Open Policy Debate will form one of the inputs to the plan.

Postal Codes

510. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment further to Parliamentary Question No. 456 of 8 March 2018, if a matter regarding an Eircode will be addressed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14242/18]

Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Denis Naughten): Eircodes are assigned to new property addresses using a valid postal address and verified geo-locations. An Post collects information on new and existing buildings, as well as changes to existing addresses and Ordnance Survey Ireland provides the geo-locations for these buildings. An Post GeoDirectory, a subsidiary company of An Post and Ordnance Survey Ireland, issue a new release of the GeoDirectory database file on a quarterly basis to Eircode in accordance with their licence agreement.

Each new address assigned an Eircode is published on the free to use Eircode Finder website and a notification letter issued to the occupant containing the Eircode of that address.

Eircode have advised me they have been in contact with the individual on a number of occasions regarding an Eircode for the new address and they have the contact details supplied. However on foot of your subsequent Parliamentary Question, I have requested Eircode to once again contact and liaise with the individual regarding the assignment of an Eircode to the new property address.

Motor Tax

511. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the policy rationale behind the introduction in 2008 of the new system of linking motor tax and VRT to the CO₂ emissions from vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13569/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Arising from a commitment in the Programme for Government 2007-2012 to rebalance the motor tax and vehicle registration tax (VRT) systems to reward the purchase of greener cars, a new basis of charging motor tax and VRT for private vehicles was introduced from July 2008. The purpose of the change was to create an incentive for consumers to purchase cars with lower carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, an important step in reducing national greenhouse gas emissions and in meeting Ireland's commitments under the Kyoto Protocol.

For both systems, vehicles were categorised in seven graduating bands A – G, based on the CO₂ emissions levels specified on the Certificate of Conformity of a vehicle. Those choosing to purchase lower-emission vehicles paid less in motor tax and VRT, and those choosing higher-emission vehicles paid more.

From January 2013, a revised banding structure was introduced for both motor tax and VRT, splitting the lowest CO₂ Band A into four and Band B into two. A zero emissions band for electric vehicles was also introduced for motor tax only. The revised banding allows for the further differentiation of the fleet in favour of the ever more environmentally friendly cars coming on to the market.

The 2008 changes also included the introduction of a new labelling system for cars based on CO₂ emission levels. The label is similar to the energy-rating label that was already in place for many consumer electrical goods at the time and includes information on fuel efficiency, the annual rate of motor tax and the applicable rate of VRT. This is designed to make consumers more fully aware of the incentives being created through the changes and to assist them in making informed decisions.

Roads Maintenance Funding

512. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if additional funding will be made available to Kerry County Council to fully recondition the Dale Road, Abbeydorney, County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13533/18]

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.

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 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 the specific 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.

All grant funding available to my Department has been allocated for this year. I continue to emphasise to local authorities the importance of prioritising expenditure on roads when allocating their 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.

Driver Test Regulations

513. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to change the system for driver tests (details supplied). [13586/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Driver testing in Ireland is carried out directly by the Road Safety Authority, RSA, to a standard that complies with the EU directive on driving licences. Studies show that young drivers and inexperienced drivers are more likely to die or be seriously injured in collisions, and the essential driver training, EDT, the course of 12 one-hour lessons, is one of several measures introduced by the RSA to help improve critical driving knowledge, skills and behaviours of new drivers. However, the completion of the 12 certified lessons does not guarantee that a learner driver has reached the required level of competence in driving. This is proven by the fact that the fail rate of driving tests undertaken by candidates who completed EDT lessons was 47.38% in 2016. This fail rate is the average rate across all test centres, not just in Mullingar.

I appreciate that there is a cost involved in the process of obtaining a driving licence, however I believe that the cost of the driving test is not particularly high as against the cost to the authority concerned to provide the service. The fee is for a certificate of competency which must be produced to obtain a driving licence. The driving test is the means to determine the competency of a driver. It would not be appropriate to offer a reduced fee to a driver if they have failed to meet the criteria and have to sit the test again.

National Transport Authority Administration

514. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the cost of the National Transport Authority in each of the years 2014 to 2017; the key functions of this body; the way in which the carrying out of these functions are invigilated by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13600/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The National Transport Authority, NTA, was established under the Dublin Transport Authority Act 2008 and its functions are set out under the Act. The Annual Report and Financial Statements of the NTA are laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas each year. The last such report was for 2016. Exchequer funding is allocated to the NTA through my Department's Vote towards its administration costs. Funding for the years 2014-2017 inclusive was as follows:

2014: €4,562,000

2015: €4,816,000

2016: €5,016,000

2017: €5,172,000

My Department has an oversight and performance delivery agreement in place with the NTA as required under the 2016 DPER code of practice for the governance of State bodies. Monitoring meetings between the Department and the NTA executive team are held on a monthly basis.

Traffic Management

515. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department has been in contact with Dublin City Council on continuing traffic gridlock, especially at thoroughfares and bridges crossing the River Liffey; his views on whether this traffic management function is being adequately carried out by the council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13601/18]

516. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his Department has been in contact with Dublin City Council on ensuring the smooth maintenance of cross-city traffic in central Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13602/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 515 and 516 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority, NTA, has statutory responsibility for the development of public transport infrastructure in the greater Dublin area,

GDA, including traffic management. As the Deputy is aware, the NTA's 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.

NTA and DCC jointly published the Dublin City Centre Transport Study in 2015 which sets out the various measures proposed for Dublin's city centre to ensure the efficient functioning of transport within the city centre. In preparing the study, Dublin City Council and the NTA reviewed the current and future transportation needs of the city centre, and the report noted that as the economy continues its recovery and employment rises, without positive intervention, increased congestion and longer journey times on the key routes to Dublin City, and within the city centre itself, will become an increasing feature of the city. The report also acknowledged that with the introduction of the Luas cross city project, Luas trams would be caught up in traffic congestion, and that the service reliability would be prone to disruption due to general traffic. Similarly the report also acknowledged the impact to the reliability of the bus network given the interaction with other road traffic. The report recognised that a rebalancing of the available road space will be required on various streets to facilitate the introduction of additional capacity for public transport, cycling and walking. Significant changes to the traffic network in the city centre will be necessary, with the objective of guaranteeing that the overall transport system is capable of operating efficiently and reliably, with consistent journey times.

NTA and DCC, in collaboration with Dublin Bus and Transport Infrastructure Ireland, are progressively implementing the measures set out in that document to enable the continued development and growth of the city with the objective of guaranteeing that the overall transport system is capable of operating efficiently and reliably, with consistent journey times. As the Deputy is aware, the City Council's College Green plaza proposal is currently with An Bord Pleanála for determination, and if approved, would remove a lot of the conflicting traffic movements that currently exist in College Green.

Looking to the future, as Minister for Transport I have ensured that 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 a multi-modal public transport investment programme between 2018 and 2021. The 4 year envelope will allocate investment to fund projects such as BusConnects, MetroLink, DART expansion, will continue investment in Dublin's light rail network, cycling and walking and traffic management measures in our capital and beyond. These programmes will be implemented by the NTA which has statutory responsibility for development of Public Transport in the GDA.

Furthermore, Government's Public Transport investment priorities are also set out in the recently published National Development Plan, NDP. The NDP seeks to protect the quality and value of the existing assets and deliver a multi-modal public transport network that will provide high-quality passenger interchange points, which facilitate convenient transfer between efficient and integrated public transport services. All the planned investment in public transport combined will add greatly to the choice and experience of the travelling public, connecting more people with more places and ease congestion in Ireland's cities.

Road Safety Authority Data

517. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 195 of 28 February 2018, the details of the additional

fields in the electronic traffic incident record; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13612/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As I stated in my response to you in Parliamentary Question No. 195 of 28 February 2018, the subject matter raised is one for the Road Safety Authority and I referred the question to the RSA for direct reply to you. I am aware that the RSA have since replied to you with information on that question.

I note your follow-up question, based on the RSA's response to you regarding Parliamentary Question No. 195, in which you are seeking the details of the additional fields in the electronic traffic incident record for collisions that the RSA now have access to. This is again a matter for the authority and I have referred the question to the authority for direct reply to you. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response is not received within 10 days.

Compulsory Purchase Orders

518. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a compulsory purchase order overrules a way leave; if so, if the way leave stands as a legal document (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13685/18]

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.

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.

Noise Pollution

519. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that decibel levels are above allowable limits at areas beside the M50 at Castleknock; if his attention has been further drawn to the fact that no mitigating measures were installed to reduce noise in his regard; the way in which he plans to address this matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13728/18]

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 don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Public Bike Schemes

520. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to fund pilot programmes for dockless bike share programmes in Cork city and county similar

to those are operated in other cities such as Singapore and London; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13732/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware as the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public and sustainable transport. However, I am not involved in the day-to-day delivery of walking and cycling infrastructure including the management of public bikes schemes.

Decisions regarding the operation and expansion of existing and proposed bike schemes in the regional cities fall under the remit of the National Transport Authority, NTA.

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

Noise Pollution

521. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of legislation to make Fingal County Council the competent independent authority for noise regulation. [13746/18]

522. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the key stakeholders (details supplied) he has met in advance of his decision to and since deciding Fingal County Council was to become the competent authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13747/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 521 and 522 together.

As the Deputy is aware, I am proposing to bring forward primary legislation to give effect to the Government decision to appoint Fingal County Council as the competent authority for the purpose of the EU airport noise regulation, 598/2014. Work is ongoing in my Department on the drafting of Heads of a Bill, as a first step in this process.

Dublin Airport Authority

523. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to an issue with the de-icer operators at Dublin Airport and that this issue caused delays during recent adverse weather; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13748/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, DAA has statutory responsibility for the development, management and operation of Dublin Airport.

I have been informed that the de-icing of aircraft at an airport is the sole responsibility of airlines or their nominated ground handling agents. DAA is not involved in aircraft de-icing in any way.

Dublin Airport is responsible for clearing snow from the runway, taxiways and apron areas on the airfield. The Deputy will recall that this task was done successfully throughout the recent

snow and ice weather events.

Sports Capital Programme

524. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when his Department will seek applications for the large scale sport infrastructure fund as announced in budget 2018; the number of years this scheme will run for; the level of funding that will be put in place for each year of the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13749/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): Up to now, the sports capital programme, SCP, has been the primary means of providing Government support to sports clubs and organisations for sports capital works.

In relation to future investment, the recently published national development plan, NDP, contains a commitment to establish a new large scale sport infrastructure fund, LSSIF, with at least €100 million available over the coming years. As part of the annual Estimates process, the multi-annual capital allocations will be reviewed and extended annually on a rolling basis to cover the subsequent five years period. This will provide Government with an annual opportunity to review the allocations in light of any implementation issues arising and/or new priorities which may emerge as the national development plan is implemented. The NDP also commits to a full mid-term review of the national development plan in 2022, to allow the Government to take stock of progress in terms of delivery of the planned projects and programmes, and to allow Government to review and confirm its investment priorities. The review will be carried out in order to prepare and publish a new updated 10 year plan for public capital investment in 2023, covering the period 2023 to 2032.

My officials will draft the terms and conditions of the new LSSIF over the coming months. The fund will be for larger projects where the proposed Government contribution would exceed the amount currently available for individual larger projects under the SCP. All projects funded under the scheme will be subject to the public spending code and State aid requirements. In terms of calls for proposals, it is envisaged that the views of the national governing bodies of sport and local authorities would be sought regarding the prioritisation of projects for possible inclusion.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

525. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the appeal under the sports capital grant scheme as submitted by a sports club (details supplied) whose original application was declined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13818/18]

526. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the appeal under the sports capital grant scheme as submitted by a sports club (details supplied) whose original application was declined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13819/18]

527. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the appeal under the sports capital grant scheme as submitted by a sports club (details supplied) whose original application was declined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13820/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): I propose to take Questions Nos. 525 to 527, inclusive, together.

Each of the organisations referred to by the Deputy made applications under the 2017 sports capital programme, SCP, but were deemed invalid at assessment stage for reasons which were notified to the clubs. All applicants 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. 149 appeals were submitted and of these 35 appeals were upheld. Appeals were upheld where the appellant demonstrated that the Department erred in its decision to make the application invalid, where it was agreed that the Department's own guide to making an application was not sufficiently clear or where it was felt the original decision involved an overly strict interpretation of the SCP terms and conditions. The appeals submitted by the organisations referred to by the Deputy were not upheld however and the clubs have been informed of this decision.

All clubs with applications that remain invalid have been informed that they can resubmit their 2017 application, along with any corrected documentation to make their application valid for the next round of the SCP without the necessity of submitting a full new application. I expect an announcement will be made shortly regarding when the new round of the programme will be open for applications.

Irish Coast Guard Issues

528. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his position articulated during a debate in Seanad Éireann on 15 February 2017, that there is no need to place the Irish Coast Guard on an additional statutory footing still remains the same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13836/18]

529. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason for his comments made during a debate in Seanad Éireann on 15 February 2017, that legislating for a voluntary group would give rise to very complex matters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13837/18]

530. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to concerns expressed by the volunteer element of the Irish Coast Guard regarding its legislative standing; if he has received correspondence in relation to same; if he has received meeting requests from members of the Irish Coast Guard in relation to this issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13838/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take Questions Nos. 528 to 530, inclusive, together.

On 15 February 2017 as a Commencement Matter in the Seanad, I comprehensively addressed the matter of Coast Guard Services, raised by Senator Keith Swanick, particularly Senator Swanick's proposition that the Coast Guard should be designated as a stand-alone primary response agency. I advised at that time that it is difficult to identify any the benefit or added value for legislation, or clearly identify what the purpose of any legislation would be, to establish a stand alone Coast Guard. I have not heard any compelling arguments to convince me otherwise in the meantime. The Coast Guard is functioning very effectively as a Division of my Department and its role is supported through various legislative instruments.

Legislating for a stand alone agency is an inherently complex task and the volunteer dimension of the Coast Guard's activities adds to that complexity. Volunteers are not, as individuals, bound by employee or contract law and offer their services freely on a voluntary basis. In

my address to the Seanad, I cited the example of the Civil Defence Act, which does not contain any provisions in respect of its large volunteer force. My records show that I last received an external representation concerning legislating for the Coast Guard in May 2017. I have had no recent representations from volunteers on the matter.

Greenways Funding

531. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when a decision will be provided on the funding status of phase 4 of the Royal Canal greenway; the requirements that need to be undertaken in order for this section to proceed to planning; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13863/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, as Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public and sustainable transport. In Budget 2018 I have secured over €110 million which is being allocated to develop cycling and walking infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area, and in the cities of Galway, Limerick, Cork and Waterford over the period 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.

I am not, however, involved in the day-to-day delivery of walking and cycling infrastructure. This falls to the National Transport Authority who have advised that works under phase 4 of the Royal Canal Greenway project are included in this year's programme of works.

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.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

532. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the names and titles of the persons who made up the membership of the appeals board that made the decisions to grant funding recently on appeal for some sports capital applications; the number of times the appeals board met; the number of times his Department officials communicated with the appeals board; when and the way in which this happened; the previous period in which funding applications were allowed and funded on appeal; the criteria for allowing appeals; if all applicants were notified that they could appeal; if all applications were assessed equally for appeal; if not, the reason therefor; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13912/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The appeals system for the 2017 Sports Capital Programme (SCP) was introduced to address concerns regarding cases where Department officials may have made errors in the original decisions to deem applications to be invalid. Previously, there was no appeals system in place for the rounds of the SCP prior to the 2017 round.

The introduction of the appeals process also ensures that the SCP now accords with the Department's Customer Action Plan which commits to maintaining "a formalised, well publicised, accessible, transparent and simple to use system of appeal/review for customers who are dissatisfied with decisions in relation to service".

Additionally, the 2017 round of the SCP was the first round of the programme under which every valid local application received an offer of funding. Consequently, the decision to make an application invalid certainly cost the applicants a grant offer. Accordingly, in the interests of equity and fairness, an appeals system was introduced for the 2017 round and will be available for all future rounds of the SCP.

Regarding the appeal process, each appeal submitted was assessed by an official not involved in the original assessment of that application. All decisions on appeal were also reviewed by at least two more senior officials. No external appeals board was established.

A total of 149 appeals were submitted and of these, 35 were upheld. Appeals were accepted where the appellant demonstrated that the Department erred in its decision to make the application invalid, or where it was agreed that the Department's own guide to making an application was not sufficiently clear, or where it was felt the original decision involved an overly strict interpretation of the SCP terms and conditions.

All organisations that submitted an invalid or partially invalid application were contacted offering them the opportunity to submit an appeal and all of the appellants have now been informed of the results of the appeal process.

In relation to future rounds of the SCP, my Department is now undertaking a general 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 shortly and an announcement regarding the next round of the SCP will be made at that stage. All applicants under the 2017 round of the programme that remain invalid have been informed that they will be given the opportunity of simply submitting corrected documentation when the next round of the programme opens without the requirement of submitting a full new application.

Departmental Expenditure

533. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the capital allocation for his Department in each of the years 2019 to 2023; the areas in which this spend will be made in each of these years; the particular projects and particular areas of investment involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13977/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The Capital Allocation for the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport for the years 2018 to 2022 can be found in the recently published **National Development Plan 2018-2027**.

<http://www.gov.ie/en/project-ireland-2040/>

The plan also discusses the key projects and programmes that will be our focus over the coming years.

Capital Allocation

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
€m	€m	€m	€m	€m
1,327	1,643	2,058	2,526	2,405

In my Budget Speech 2018, I have listed the priorities and programmes within my Department for 2018 and provided information on how the Capital allocations will be spent.

<http://www.dttas.ie/speeches/2017/minister-ross-budget-2018-speech>

As set out in the Government's recently published National Development Plan, as part of the annual Estimates process, the multi-annual capital allocations will be reviewed and extended annually on a rolling basis to cover the coming 5 year period. This will provide Government with an annual opportunity to review the allocations in light of any implementation issues arising and/or new priorities which may emerge as the National Development Plan is implemented. The NDP also commits to a full mid-term review of the National Development Plan in 2022, to allow Government to take stock of progress in terms of delivery of the planned projects and programmes, and to allow Government to review and reaffirm its investment priorities. The review will be carried out in order to prepare and publish a new updated 10-year plan for public capital investment in 2023, covering the period 2023 to 2032.

Bus Services

534. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that no buses serve the IFSC area from Dublin 15; if new bus routes serving the IFSC area from Dublin 15 will be introduced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13990/18]

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. The National Transport Authority (NTA) is the statutory body with responsibility for overseeing the delivery of bus services and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

Taxi Regulations

535. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason there is no taxi suitability test centre (details supplied) resulting in enforced costs on those travelling to other centres to complete the test; his plans to reverse this decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14085/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013. The NTA currently contract Applus Car Testing Ireland Limited to provide a nationwide network of twelve dedicated centres for SPSV suitability inspections.

Given the Authority's role in this regard, and in order to be of assistance, I have referred your question to the NTA for their direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Taxi Regulations

536. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if accommodation will be made available for families of deceased taxi plate owners (details supplied); if there is discretion for individual cases; if the NTA will undertake a publicity campaign to highlight the importance of this form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14105/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): The regulation of the small public service vehicle (SPSV) industry is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA) under the provisions of the Taxi Regulation Act 2013.

As the Deputy may be aware, section 15 of this 2013 Act (as amended) provides for the transfer of a SPSV licence in the event of death. Accordingly, a person that has been nominated by the licence holder, before his or her death, can apply to the NTA to continue to operate the SPSV licence.

In light of the NTA's responsibilities in these matters, I have referred your question to the Authority for their consideration and direct reply to you. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

Road Projects Status

537. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to upgrade a road (details supplied) to regional road status within County Donegal; if this road will form a strategic part of the local infrastructure in a post-Brexit scenario; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14106/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for the classification of roads as either National or Regional under the Roads Act, 1993. I am empowered under Section 10 of the 1993 Act to classify any public road as a national or regional road and periodic reviews are undertaken in that regard. A public road, other than one classified by me as a national road or a regional road, is a local road. Road classification needs to follow appropriate and logical criteria and have regard to existing legislative provisions. Careful consideration of such proposals is, therefore, required.

Should a person or Donegal County Council wish to raise road reclassification issues relating to a particular road, it can do so by writing to the Roads Division of my Department enclosing the following information:

- Road number and name of road or section of road in question including relevant townlands/junctions.
- Reason for reclassification request.
- Map(s) indicating current road classification.
- Map(s) indicating requested road classification.

Any such matters so raised can then be considered as part of the road classification process.

Noise Pollution

538. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport further to Parliamentary Question No. 45 of 10 May 2017, in the context of this litigation being completed, if he will request that this documentation to be furnished to the residents without delay. [14119/18]

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

aware, the daa has statutory responsibility to manage, operate and develop Dublin Airport, including the North Runway project.

I am advised that the the legal proceedings in question are not, in fact, completed. It would therefore be inappropriate for me to comment further on issues to which these proceedings relate. When the litigation is concluded, I will of course be happy to arrange at that point for the provision of any information that is appropriate to release.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

539. **Deputy Seamus Healy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the marking system in respect of an application for a sports capital grant by a centre (details supplied) will be clarified; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14126/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): The full scoring system and assessment procedure for the 2017 Sports Capital Programme (SCP) is available on my Departments website at <http://www.dttas.ie/sites/default/files/publications/sport/english/sports-capital-programme-scoring-system-and-assessment-procedures/assessment-manual-2017-scp.pdf>.

In assessing all applications under the programme, my Department relies on information supplied by applicants. The marks obtained by all applicants under the criteria “level of socio-economic disadvantage” were based on the Pobal Deprivation Index and determined solely by the coordinates supplied by the organisation in their application.

Sport and Recreational Development

540. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he expects to publish the promised review of the national sports policy; his plans to reintroduce the local authority swimming pool programme as part of the review; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14186/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As I have previously outlined to the Deputy, it is my expectation that the new National Sports Policy will be published shortly, most likely in Quarter 2 of this year, following its consideration by Government within the next few weeks.

Insofar as the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme (LASPP) is concerned, the position remains that there are four swimming pool projects in the current LASPP and the priority in 2018 will be on progressing these projects.

In relation to the future funding of swimming pools, the upcoming National Sports Policy will include a specific focus on how Government should fund sports facilities, including swimming pools, in the years ahead.

Rail Network

541. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the design work will commence on the electrification of the Kildare rail line to Hazelhatch, County Kildare; when planning approval will be sought; the likely cost of the project; the likely date for

commencement of construction and completion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14187/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): As the Deputy is aware, the National Transport Authority's (NTA) 'Transport Strategy for the GDA 2016-2035' proposes implementation of the overall DART Expansion Programme. As outlined in the recently published 'National Development Plan 2018-2027: Project Ireland 2040' (NDP), the DART Expansion Programme is a series of projects that will create a full metropolitan area DART Network for Dublin with all of the lines linked and connected over the period of the plan.

The initial sequencing of investment under the NDP will focus on delivery of non-underground tunnel elements of the Programme using the recently opened rail link and existing connector tunnel under the Phoenix Park (which has provided the option for Kildare commuters to access the city centre stations of Connolly, Tara Street and Pearse). This sequencing and focus includes buying additional fleet for the DART network and measures such as re-signalling, junction and station changes to provide expanded services. The next step will be 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. It will also include new stations to provide interchange with bus, LUAS and Metro networks.

The significant benefit to using the recently opened rail link and existing connector tunnel under the Phoenix Park and the proposed sequence of investment is that it will enable additional passenger services to be put in place much earlier using existing infrastructure with some enhancements. This integrated rail network will provide a core, high-capacity transit system for the region and will deliver a very substantial increase in peak-hour capacity on all lines from Maynooth and Celbridge/Hazelhatch as well as Drogheda and Greystones. The route for the remaining element of the overall DART Expansion Programme, the DART Underground Tunnel, will be established and protected to allow for its future delivery.

In light of the NTA's responsibility in this area, I have forwarded the Deputy's 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

542. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the timeline for the upgrade of the traffic safety works to be carried out on the N5 at the village of Termonbarry, County Roscommon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14190/18]

543. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the timeline for the upgrade of the traffic safety works to be carried out on the N5 at the junction of Scramogue, County Roscommon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14191/18]

544. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the timeline for the upgrade of the traffic safety works to be carried out on the N5 at the village of Tulsk, County Roscommon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14192/18]

545. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the timeline for the upgrade of the traffic safety works to be carried out on the N5 at the village of Frenchpark, County Roscommon; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14193/18]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I propose to take

Questions Nos. 542 to 545, inclusive, together.

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

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

Departmental Expenditure

546. **Deputy Denise Mitchell** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the capital allocation for her Department in each of the years 2019 to 2023; the areas in which this will be spent in each of these years; and the details of particular projects and areas of investment. [13786/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The National Development Plan sets out the Government's capital investment priorities that will underpin the new National Planning Framework. My Department has been allocated €156 million in capital expenditure over the period 2018-2022 under the Plan as set out in the following table. The Deputy might note that the provisions for my Department in the years post-2022 will be allocated through the annual Estimates process as the rolling five-year multi-annual ceilings are updated.

PLAN

Year/s	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Capital Al-locations (€ million)	28	32	31	32	33

It is not possible at this time to identify specific projects that will be funded under the Plan but the resources will support continued investment in the following areas:

- Childcare, to ensure quality and supply of sufficient childcare places
- Youth services that support and target disadvantaged young people and improve their employability
- Tusla, through the continued development of ICT and standards of accommodation, and
- Oberstown Children Detention Campus through the provision of safe and secure places.

In addition to this, the Plan also contains a commitment to provide an additional €250 million to support the implementation of a 10 year, cross-Government Early Years Strategy to be published in 2018. One of the core objectives of this strategy will be to increase the proportion of children who have access to high quality, early years care and education. Officials in my Department are currently examining possibilities for a multi-annual capital programme for childcare as well as research on existing capital holdings and future capital needs for the sector, at national and local level. Once gathered, this data will be used to inform large-scale, targeted capital investments in childcare.

Child and Family Agency Data

547. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of children at risk cases which Tusla has categorised as founded and unfounded for each of the past 12 months in tabular form; and if this information is not available, the reason these figures are not recorded. [13794/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): Referrals to Tusla's Child Protection and Welfare services are categorised as either Welfare or Protection referrals. Table 1 provides a breakdown of referrals by type from Q1 2016 to Q3 2017. Data is provided quarterly in arrears. The figures in Table 1 are published in Tusla's Q4 report for 2017.

Table 1.

Referrals by Type							
	Q1 2016	Q2 2016	Q3 2016	Q4 2016	Q1 2017	Q2 2017	Q3 2017
Welfare	6,754	7,229	7,145	7,184	8,171	9,264	7,732
Abuse	4,552	5,035	4,587	4,913	5,458	4,999	4,766
Total	11,306	11,264	11,732	12,097	13,629	14,263	12,498

When a referral is received, a preliminary enquiry is carried out. This can include verifying the details provided by the referrer, the details of the child, and establishing whether the child has been referred to social services previously. The information is weighed to determine whether it meets the threshold for further assessment.

If the threshold is met, the referral may proceed to an initial assessment by an allocated child protection social worker. An initial assessment involves meeting with the child and family, and information is gathered on the needs and risks relating to the child, to determine what actions can be taken to provide the best outcome for the child.

Table 2 outlines the number of referrals where a preliminary enquiry proceeded to initial assessment. Figures are provided quarterly in arrears, and subject to ongoing validation.

Percentage of preliminary enquiries and initial assessments carried out							
	Q1 2016	Q2 2016	Q3 2016	Q4 2016	Q1 2017	Q2 2017	Q3 2017
Pre-liminary Enquiry Completed	99%	98%	97%	98%	98%	97%	98%
Initial Assessment Completed	46%	43%	41%	43%	40%	34%	36%

Following the initial assessment the case may be determined to need further action from a child protection service, but may be referred to family support or other appropriate services. Where the assessment identifies a child protection need the social worker will continue working with the child and family to support a safe outcome for the child.

Summary data from Tusla for Q4 2017 reported outcomes following an initial assessment as 49% no further action from child protection, 11% child protection response, 24% further child

protection assessment, 2% admission to care and 24% child welfare/family conference action.

Child and Family Agency Data

548. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of retrospective reports of child sexual violence Tusla has categorised as founded and unfounded for each of the past 12 months in tabular form; and if this information is not available, the reason these figures are not recorded. [13795/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): A historical or retrospective allegation is where an adult discloses abuse experienced in childhood. It is my understanding that the majority of these disclosures concern sexual abuse. This is a very complex and worrying situation.

It is important to note that all child protection referrals which allege current or past criminal activity are referred to An Garda Síochána. Tusla's focus is to assess retrospective or historical allegations to determine any indication of current risk to children. In cases of an urgent risk to a child, the disclosure is acted upon immediately.

In order to proceed with an assessment of current risk an adult may pose to children, Tusla is dependent on the person making an allegation engaging directly with them, and being prepared for their identity to be shared with the alleged abuser.

Tusla has a limited role where there is no evidence of a current risk to children. In relation to the adult making the disclosure of abuse, Tusla may assist them in accessing HSE counselling services.

Tusla publish their performance and activity data monthly, and quarterly in arrears.

Table 1 lays out the number of cases of retrospective abuse allocated and waiting allocation for January - December 2017. It should be noted that the December figure is a draft figure based on returns from 14.5 of 17 areas.

-	Jan'17	Feb'17	Mar'17	Apr'17	May'17	Jun'17	Jul'17	Aug'17	Sep'17	Oct'17	Nov'17	Dec'17
Allocated	1,114	1,144	1,141	1,264	1,292	1,326	1,370	1,397	1,377	1,443	1,473	1,259
Waiting Allocation	871	841	754	661	590	572	579	561	501	479	436	394
Open Cases	1,985	1,985	1,895	1,925	1,882	1,898	1,949	1,958	1,878	1,922	1,909	1,653
Referrals	93	122	139	83	141	90	99	118	103	105	125	128
Total	3970	4092	3929	3933	3905	3886	1949	4034	3859	3949	3943	3434

Child and Family Agency Expenditure

549. **Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs when capital funding for renovation works will be made available to a centre (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13812/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The organisation to which the Deputy refers is in receipt of funding from Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. It is not funded under the Family Resource Centre Programme, which is administered

by Tusla. I have asked Tusla to respond directly to the Deputy's query with regard to the issue of capital funding.

Adoption Records Provision

550. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the procedure a person who was born and adopted in the 1950s in Dublin should take in order to find their original birth certificate (details supplied). [13835/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): At present an adopted person may access the information required to obtain their birth certificate where there is birth parent consent or where the birth parent is deceased. The Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016 provides for the first time a statutory entitlement to identity information for adopted persons. It provides for a structured and regulated access to information and tracing services for those affected by adoption. It sets out the information that can be provided and the circumstances in which it can be provided to adopted persons and provides that services will be provided by Tusla. A key provision in the Bill provides that an adopted person aged 18 years or over who was adopted prior to commencement of the Bill will be provided with the information required to apply for his or her birth certificate, subject to certain conditions. The Bill passed Second Stage in Seanad Éireann in May 2017.

Information and tracing services to adopted persons are provided by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. Persons seeking such information should contact the Information and Tracing services of TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency (www.tusla.ie) or the Adoption Authority of Ireland www.aai.gov.ie.

Youth Services Provision

551. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if he will address the funding cuts that have taken place in regard to organisations (details supplied); the funding received since 2007, in tabular form; when funding will be restored in view of the fact that pay restoration has also been a factor over this period; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13900/18]

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 areas.

My Department, along with all government departments, was required to deliver substantial savings on all funding programmes in line with the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure 2012-2014. My Department sought to ensure front line youth services, particularly those for the most vulnerable young people, were protected as far as possible from the impact of the reduction in funding.

In recent years funding for the provision of youth services has been increased on an annual basis by €1.1m in 2016 to provide current funding of €51.895m, by €5.5m in 2017 to provide current funding of €57.395 and by a further €1.5m in 2018 to provide current funding of €58.895m.

I am aware that a number of youth workers based in Dublin City and employed in projects administered by the City of Dublin Youth Service Board, are on scales linked to public pay

scales and may be eligible for increases under the Haddington Road agreement.

It is important to note that the youth workers employed by these services are not public servants and that this local arrangement is unique to services operating in Dublin City.

Based on the information provided to my Department, the cost of implementing the Haddington Road agreement in these Dublin City services is more than offset by the increases provided to all youth services over the past two years. In 2016, all staff-led youth services were provided with a 2.5% increase in allocation. In 2017, services were provided with a 5% increase in their allocation.

The funding provided to Ballymun Regional Youth Resource and Poppintree Youth since the establishment of my Department in 2011 is provided in the following tables.

Ballymun Regional Youth Service	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Special Projects for Youth	€47,641	€44,544	€176,820	€170,189	€170,189	€221,135	€232,192
Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund Round 1 & 2	€297,897	€705,363	€662,706	€637,854	€637,854	€653,801	€769,188
Local Drugs Task Force	€99,599	€93,125	€103,168	€99,299	€99,299	€101,782	€106,871
Sports Development Officer		€100,980	€90,882	€87,474	€87,474	€89,661	€94,144
Poppintree Youth	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Special Projects for Youth	€93,967	€87,859	€99,176	€95,457	€95,457	€97,843	€102,735
Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund Round 1 & 2	€114,348	€106,915	€112,379	€108,165	€108,265	€110,869	€116,412

School Completion Programme

552. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the funding cuts to clubs (details supplied); and if alternative funding will be allocated. [13901/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The provision of Breakfast Clubs by Ballymun Education Support Team (BEST) School Completion Programme (SCP) was funded under Ballymun Local Drugs Task Force. Tusla Educational Welfare Services does not provide funding in this regard.

School meals funding is under the remit of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Applications for funding can be made through the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, School Meals Local Projects Scheme.

Mother and Baby Homes Inquiries

553. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if there is support either financial or otherwise, for a person that was born in a mother and baby home to attend counselling and or to access taxi services to attend counselling. [13971/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The issues raised by the Deputy relate to the provision of health services and as such are policy matters for my colleague the Minister for Health and his Department. I am aware that the Health Service Executive (HSE) does provide counselling services and can provide transport services/supports in certain circumstances to assist patients to access services provided on its behalf. However, eligibility for any support would need to be determined by the HSE.

If the Deputy is in a position to provide my office with additional details of an individual case, including the current service provider, I will certainly make enquiries with the Department of Health on behalf of this person.

Separately, access to health and well being supports is one of the issues to be examined through the Collaborative Forum process which I announced recently. The selection process for members of the Forum is due to commence shortly and participants will drive forward a process to identify and prioritise actions and solutions to issues of concern to them.

Early Childhood Care and Education Funding

554. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the status of progress made by her Department in order to find a solution to the current inequitable administering of commercial rates between private early years' service providers for ECCE and those offering full day care services and after school services; the interactions between her Department and other Departments and agencies on this matter; if legal advice has been sought; if her Department has a timeframe for a solution to be found; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14005/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): The matter of rates payments for Early Years' service providers does not fall under the remit of my Department, nor does it have a role in determining which properties are rateable. This is the responsibility of the Commissioner of Valuation. The Valuation Office falls under the aegis of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

In this regard, I understand that the Valuation Act, 2001 as amended by the Valuation (Amendment) Act 2015 provides that all buildings used or developed for any purpose, including constructions affixed thereto, are rateable unless expressly exempted under Schedule 4 of the Act. Under Schedule 4, paragraph 22, community childcare facilities are exempt from commercial rates, by virtue of the fact that they operate on a not-for-profit basis. The Valuations Office have also advised that, under Schedule 4 paragraph 10, facilities who provide the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE) only are exempt from commercial rates.

Officials from this Department have met with officials from the Department of Justice and Equality – under whose aegis the Valuation Office formerly fell– to discuss the issue of commercial rates for childcare providers. At this meeting it was re-iterated that properties of occupiers that operate with the intention of making a profit are rateable, and that this applies to private childcare facilities offering services over and above ECCE only.

My Department sought legal advice in respect of private for-profit childcare facilities to establish if there may be grounds for exemption under the Act. The legal advice received confirmed that childcare facilities established for the purposes of making a profit are indeed rate-

able, and that no exemptions apply, other than as outlined above.

I remain committed to the provision of affordable and accessible childcare, and will continue to engage on this matter as appropriate.

Special Care Beds Data

555. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the capacity for special care beds in each of the special care units nationally (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14174/18]

556. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of young persons currently placed in special care (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14175/18]

557. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of young persons currently on a list for special care beds (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14176/18]

558. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to increase the number of beds available in special care (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14177/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I propose to take Questions Nos. 555 to 558, inclusive, together.

I have asked Tusla, the Child and Family Agency to provide the details requested by the Deputy and I will forward the information when it is to hand.

Special Care Beds Data

559. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if all special care units in operation are in full compliance with the new statutory regulations (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14178/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): As the Deputy is aware, Special care is where a child, in the absence of criminal charges, is detained on foot of an Order of the High Court, so that the child, deemed to be at immediate risk of harm to his or her life, safety or well-being, can receive the appropriate therapeutic support

The Child Care (Amendment) Act 2011 provides a statutory framework for special care by which jurisdiction is granted to the High Court to hear special care and interim special care orders. The Act also proposes (by way of the insertion of a new Part IVA) a substantial amendment to the Child Care Act 1991 creating a legislative framework within which special care procedures can be governed.

Under the new provisions the High Court may make a special care order where it is satisfied that the child has attained 11 years of age and that the child's behaviour poses a real and substantial risk of harm to his or her life, health, safety, development or welfare and where the provision of continued care other than special care and treatment/services under the Mental Health Act 2001 is not adequate to address the therapeutic requirements of the child.

The High Court has discretion regarding the requirement for a consultation procedure with parents and their child and in relation to the requirement for a family welfare conference prior to the granting of the order. The special care order has effect for a maximum of three months from the date of the order and must be reviewed in each four-week period for which the order has effect.

The High Court is obliged to reassess the requirement for the original order and may vary the order on review. Reviews of the special care order can be heard even where the child is in special care outside the State. The High Court is granted the power to extend the original order for a maximum of two further three-month periods (the maximum duration of a special care order is nine months) where it is deemed that the child is benefitting from the treatment or where the circumstances warranting the original order continue to exist. The renewal applications must be made prior to the expiration of the original order/repeat order and the extension takes effect at the expiry of the original order/repeat order as the case demands.

The commencement of the relevant provisions of the Child Care (Amendment) Act 2011, in conjunction with the making of commencement orders for provisions contained in the Health Act 2007 and the Child Care (Amendment) Act 2015, has resulted in a legal framework for the making of special care orders by the High Court and whereby all special care units are to be registered and inspected by HIQA (in accordance with the provisions of the Health Act 2007). It might also be noted that new (HIQA) standards for special care units, agreed between the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Tusla and HIQA, are also now operational.

The commencement of this new regulatory regime, with effect from 1 January, 2018, is particularly relevant in light of the most recent amendment to the Constitution providing for the rights of the child.

It should be noted that the Child Care (Amendment) Act 2011 provides for a transitional phase for special care units of 12 months – and during this phase they are deemed to be registered for the purposes of the Health Act 2007. Therefore, HIQA's formal registration of all Tusla special care units must be concluded by the end of this year.

Officials from my Department worked closely with colleagues in Tusla and HIQA in relation to the drafting of all relevant Regulations and standards. I have been informed by Tusla that the Agency has been preparing for special care registration for the last twelve months and a senior manager has been reassigned to ensure that special care units are ready for registration. The Service Director for Residential and Special Care has been in discussion with HIQA and will make the necessary applications for Registration as agreed with HIQA on the 12th of April 2018. Special Care Services are currently preparing for registration inspections following these applications.

Family Resource Centres

560. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs if she has received a request to provide funding for the provision of a family resource centre for Longford town in 2018 (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14229/18]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone): I can confirm that I received a representation regarding the issue referred to by the Deputy on 15th March, 2018.

In Budget 2018, I was pleased to secure an additional €3.0m for Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, to support the Family Resource Centre Programme. This increased Tusla's budget for

the Programme to just under €16.5m. The additional funding provided is being used to support existing Family Resource Centres, and has also provided for expansion of the Programme with the addition of eleven new centres.

Following a public application process, Tusla recently announced the eleven centres which are being included in the Programme this year.

I understand from Tusla that the applications to join the Family Resource Centre Programme were of a very high standard. The criteria considered included the size and make-up of the geographical area; the social and economic conditions of the specified area; and the overall population breakdown of the area that would be serviced by the centre. The criteria also considered the structure of the organisation applying to the programme; its objectives, targets, and current relationships with other organisations; and the inclusion of available research, community projects, and needs assessments with the application.

Tusla received a high number of applications - 47 in total - for inclusion in the programme. One of the applications was for a centre in the Longford area. Tusla was faced with a difficult decision making process in securing eleven new centres for inclusion in the programme.

It is important that the needs of children and families are met in the best way possible, particularly in areas of disadvantage. I will continue to support the work of Family Resource Centres and family support services throughout the country.

Community Services Programme

561. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if the case of an association (details supplied) in County Kerry will be examined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13917/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): The Community Services Programme supports community organisations to provide local services through a social enterprise model. Around 425 organisations are supported under the CSP, with funding provided as a contribution to the cost of a manager and an agreed number of full-time equivalent positions.

The organisation in question submitted a business plan to Pobal in 2017 as part of the normal *CSP re-contracting process*. The business plan failed to satisfy key CSP appraisal criteria. In particular, there were concerns regarding the organisation's continued financial sustainability. The CSP contribution is based on a 39-hour working week and is a fixed annual contribution that is required to be co-funded by supported organisations from other sources, for example, from income received from the public use of their facilities and services. The organisation has very low levels of traded income and, despite the CSP funding available to support each post, could not show it was capable of sustaining the number of posts sought.

The business plan also failed to show sufficient need for the service, that it was a sufficiently strong strategic fit under the CSP or that it represented good value-for-money.

It was decided to continue funding the organisation under CSP Strand 1 with funding reduced to a more sustainable level for the organisation i.e. two full-time equivalent posts. The organisation appealed the decision but, following a full review by Pobal, the original decision was upheld.

The formal CSP appeals process is now exhausted. The new funding arrangements, provid-

ing support for two full-time equivalent posts under Strand 1, will commence from July 2018.

Dormant Accounts Fund

562. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development his views on the assessment of the Comptroller and Auditor General that the low level of disbursement from the dormant accounts funds including the allocation of funds to measures which do not fully use the resources, prevents other programmes from being funded; if this has the consequence that the resources available from the fund are not being used in an efficient and effective manner; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13702/18]

564. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if the review of the dormant accounts disbursement scheme, recommended by the Comptroller and Auditor General (details supplied) will evaluate the appropriateness of the amount set aside in the fund as a statutory reserve; if this requirement can be fulfilled by some alternative arrangement for example insurance; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13704/18]

565. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if the review of the dormant accounts disbursement scheme, recommended by the Comptroller and Auditor General (details supplied) will consider the accounting methods that apply to the dormant accounts fund in which each disbursement, while not taxpayer funded is accounted as a loss to the line department and as a diminution of the resources available to the Exchequer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13705/18]

566. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if the review of the dormant accounts disbursement scheme recommended by the Comptroller and Auditor General (details supplied) will consider whether reclaims from the fund will continue to be provided for by way of reserve rather than for example to taking an insurance policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13706/18]

568. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if the review of the dormant accounts disbursement scheme recommended by the Comptroller and Auditor General (details supplied) will consider the reasons for the low level of disbursements; if allocating funds to measures which do not fully use the resources prevents other programmes from being funded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13708/18]

569. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if the review of the dormant accounts disbursement scheme recommended by the Comptroller and Auditor General (details supplied) will consider if the public profile of the fund has diminished since the abolition of the dormant accounts board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13709/18]

573. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if the review of the dormant accounts disbursement scheme recommended by the Comptroller and Auditor General (details supplied) will consider if funds dormant since for example the early nineteenth century should continue to be considered in the same way as funds dormant for sixteen years or within the lifetime of persons currently living; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13713/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 562, 564 to 566, inclusive, 568, 569 and 573 together.

I refer to the reply to Question No. [530] and Question Nos [531-535] of 8 March, which

outlines the position with regard to the review of the Dormant Accounts Disbursement Scheme 2013-2016.

These replies outlined that the Comptroller and Auditor General's report contained a single recommendation that the statutory review of the Disbursement Scheme should be carried out to identify how well the scheme was implemented and how future schemes can be designed to ensure the scheme objectives are met. The report also stated that the review should consider the reasons for the low level of disbursements, whether allocating funds to measures which do not fully use the resources prevent other programmes from being funded, and how the available funding can be best applied.

The replies also noted that following the transfer of the relevant functions to my Department in July 2017, my Department is now undertaking the statutory review, which will be completed by the end of June 2018. The key focus of the review is to address the points raised by the Comptroller and Auditor General and to ensure that the significant resources currently available from the fund are used in an efficient and effective manner. The review will also identify and consider wider and longer term issues, including how to best ensure the long term sustainability of the Dormant Accounts Fund, and public awareness of the Fund .

Where issues such as the accounting methods or accounting procedures are found to negatively impact on the administration and overall effectiveness of the fund, my Department will liaise with other relevant stakeholders, including the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the National Treasury Management Agency, to ensure that the impact of these issues can be mitigated.

However, it would not be appropriate, at this stage, to speculate on the possible conclusions of the review.

Dormant Accounts Fund

563. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of housing units, new-build or refurbished to which the dormant accounts fund has contributed since the commencement of the dormant accounts acts 2001 and 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13703/18]

570. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if the review of the dormant accounts disbursement scheme recommended by the Comptroller and Auditor General (details supplied) will consider the way in which the available funding can be best applied including in the area of addressing homelessness; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13710/18]

571. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if the review of the dormant accounts disbursement scheme recommended by the Comptroller and Auditor General (details supplied) will consider the way in which to ensure the scheme objectives are met and the way in which to ensure that the significant resources available from the fund are used in an efficient and effective manner including measures to address the homelessness crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13711/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 563, 570 and 571 together.

The legislation governing the Dormant Accounts Funds provides a framework for the disbursement of funds for measures targeted at socially, economically and educationally disadvan-

tagged people, and people with a disability. Under the Acts, a three-year Disbursement Scheme is prepared which sets out the priority areas for funding, underpinned by annual Action Plans which outline specific programmes to be funded each year.

The current Disbursement Scheme covering the period 2017-2019 and the previous Disbursement Scheme for 2013-2016 both include a provision to enable the delivery of measures to people who are homeless through the provision of non-accommodation based facilities such as drop-in/day centres. It is a matter for relevant line Departments to develop specific proposals in relation to this objective, for inclusion in the annual Dormant Accounts Action Plan. However, to date, no specific measures addressing this provision have emerged in subsequent Plans.

It would similarly be a matter for the relevant Department sponsoring a specific measure in the Dormant Accounts Fund Action Plans to collect data on the implementation of that measure.

Following the transfer to my Department in July 2017 of functions relating to the Dormant Accounts Funds legislation, my Department now coordinates the preparation of the Disbursement Scheme and the Annual Action Plans across Government. The preparation of the 2018 Action Plan has commenced and Minister Kyne recently wrote to each Minister requesting them to identify potential measures within their areas of responsibility for inclusion in the new Plan.

With regard to the review of the 2013-2016 Disbursement Scheme, the key focus of that review is to address the points raised in the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General with regard to the administration of the Dormant Accounts Disbursement Scheme, and to ensure that the significant resources currently available from the fund are used in an efficient and effective manner. As part of this work, the review will consider whether the current operation of Disbursement Schemes is resulting in any unforeseen barriers to the funding of appropriate measures in any particular policy area across Government.

Questions Nos. 564 to 566, inclusive, answered with Question No. 562.

Dormant Accounts Fund

567. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if the review of the dormant accounts disbursement scheme recommended by the Comptroller and Auditor General (details supplied) will consider whether to reinstate a dormant accounts board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13707/18]

572. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if the review of the dormant accounts disbursement scheme recommended by the Comptroller and Auditor General (details supplied) will consider if the reinstatement of a dormant accounts board; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13712/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I propose to take Questions Nos. 567 and 572 together.

The report of the Comptroller and Auditor General on the Accounts for the Public Service 2016 indicated that a statutory review of the 2013-2016 Disbursement Scheme (required under the Dormant Accounts Act 2012), which should have been completed by the end of 2016, had not been conducted.

The Comptroller and Auditor General's report contained a single recommendation that the statutory review of the Disbursement Scheme should be carried out to identify how well the scheme was implemented and how future schemes can be designed to ensure the scheme objec-

tives are met. The report also stated that the review should consider the reasons for the low level of disbursements, whether allocating funds to measures which do not fully use the resources prevent other programmes from being funded, and how the available funding can be best applied.

Following the transfer of the relevant functions to my Department in July 2017, my Department is now undertaking the statutory review, which will be completed by the end of June 2018. The key focus of the review is to address the points raised by the Comptroller and Auditor General and to ensure that the significant resources currently available from the fund are used in an efficient and effective manner. The review will also identify and consider wider and longer term issues, including how administration of the fund is best managed over the longer term.

It would not be appropriate, at this stage, to speculate on the possible conclusions of the review on the question of the future administration of the fund.

Question No. 568 answered with Question No. 562.

Question No. 569 answered with Question No. 562.

Questions Nos. 570 and 571 answered with Question No. 563.

Question No. 572 answered with Question No. 567.

Question No. 573 answered with Question No. 562.

Local and Community Development Programme Expenditure

574. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the amount spent on the Local and Community Development Programme in each of the years 2015 to 2017; and the allocated spend for 2018, by county in tabular form. [14038/18]

Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring): I refer the Deputy to the reply to PQ11821/18 (Question No 907) of 20 March 2018, which sets out all LCDP Funding in the requested format.

In relation to allocated spend for 2018, the LCDP was replaced by the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) from 1 April 2015 in most parts of the Country. The table sets out the SICAP funding allocation by county for 2018.

SICAP Funding

County	2018 Allocation
Carlow	547,157
Cavan	756,620
Clare	872,448
Cork	3,159,205
Donegal	2,008,916
Dublin	9,656,954
Galway	2,251,039
Kerry	1,629,599
Kildare	1,061,036
Kilkenny	632,126

County	2018 Allocation
Laois	586,627
Leitrim	524,650
Limerick	2,185,427
Longford	511,559
Louth	1,313,599
Mayo	1,269,911
Meath	393,336
Monaghan	631,656
Offaly	760,463
Roscommon	598,350
Sligo	585,514
Tipperary	1,173,386
Waterford	1,120,415
Westmeath	781,539
Wexford	1,701,748
Wicklow	1,314,319
Total	38,027,599

Public Sector Staff Retirements

575. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the compulsory retirement age will be applicable to the private sector in view of the recent change to the public service compulsory retirement age; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13566/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I welcome the recent confirmation by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to increase to 70 the compulsory retirement age of public servants recruited before the 1st April 2004.

In relation to compulsory retirement ages in the labour market more generally, there is no universal mandatory retirement age in Ireland. The setting of retirement age remains a matter for agreement between employers/employees and the employment contract.

Notwithstanding this, the Government believes that labour market practices should evolve to reflect the reality that as people live longer and healthier lives, many people wish to, and can, work longer and make a positive contribution through their work to our society.

This is why the recently launched ‘Roadmap for Pensions Reform 2018-2023’ confirms future commitments on top of a range of actions already taken to support a positive ageing environment, where older people are, to the greatest extent possible, encouraged and facilitated in participating in the workforce.

To this end, and with the input of the social partners, the Workplace Relations Commission recently published a ‘Code of Practice on Longer Working’. The code informs best practice in managing the engagement between employers and employees in the run up to retirement. This includes requests to work beyond what might be considered the ‘normal retirement age’ in the employment concerned. Following publication of this code, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission will now prepare and publish guidance material for employers on the use of fixed-term contracts beyond retirement age.

The Government is determined that the provisions detailed in the Roadmap for Pensions Reform will combine to result in greater employee flexibility in the retirement decision. To ensure this is the case, employment practices in this area will be kept under close review in the near term. Should it appear that these provisions are not resulting in improved flexibility for workers by the end of 2018, the Government will actively consider measures to restrict the capacity to use mandatory retirement provisions relative to the prevailing State pension age. To this end an Interdepartmental Group chaired by my Department will be convened to review practices in this area.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Civil Registration Legislation

576. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position regarding a matter (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13588/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The provisions for registering the name of a father, other than the person to whom the mother is married, are contained in section 22(3) of the Civil Registration Act 2004 (as amended):

- Section 22(3)(a) provides for the registration of a person, other than the husband, as the father of the child on foot of a statutory declaration by the husband that he is not the father of the child.

- Section 22(3)(b) provides for the registration of a person, other than the husband, as the father of the child on foot of a statutory declaration by the mother that she has been living apart from her husband by virtue of a decree of divorce, a decree of divorce *a mensa et thoro*, a decree of nullity or a deed of separation.

There is also provision in section 22(2)(d) that allows for the registration of a person, other than the mother's husband, on foot of a Court order under section 45 of the Status of Children Act 1987.

These are the only provisions that allow for the registration of anyone other than the mother's husband as the father of the child.

I can further update the Deputy, by way of information, that section 6(1) of the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014 amends section 22 to provide for registration of a person, other than the mother's husband, as the father of the child where there is no decree of divorce, decree of divorce *a mensa et thoro*, decree of nullity or deed of separation. This section of the Civil Registration (Amendment) Act 2014 has yet to be commenced so the provisions of section 22 as I have outlined remain in operation.

Employment Rights

577. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the position in relation to the rights, including terms and conditions, of au pairs working here; the obligations of the host family; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13609/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):

There is no separate legal definition of the term “au pair” in Irish legislation, and individuals described as “au pairs”, “nannies” or “child-minders” are not exempted or treated as separate categories of workers under Irish employment law.

Ireland’s body of employment rights legislation protects all employees who are legally employed on an employer-employee basis, regardless of what title is given to them. Therefore, once it is clear that a person is working under a contract of employment (written or verbal), on a full-time or part-time basis, that person has the same protection under employment law as other employees, including entitlement to the national minimum wage.

All employers, including those in private homes, carry the same obligations in relation to compliance with employment law.

My Department’s remit in this area is primarily concerned with ensuring that those people found to be employees can enforce their rights, as provided for under employment rights legislation. Scope section in the Department makes statutory decisions on employment status and insurability of employment under the Social Welfare Act. Employers, employees and the self-employed may apply to Scope for an investigation of an employment status and a determination of the correct class of PRSI.

The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC), which operates under the remit of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, is mandated to secure compliance with employment rights legislation. In 2007, WRC published a “Code of Practice for Protecting Persons employed in Other People’s Homes”, which provides a useful guide for employers and which can be accessed on their website. The WRC’s Customer Service Section provides information to both employers and employees in relation to employment, equality and industrial relations rights and obligations. The WRC’s Customer Service Section can be contacted at Lo-call: 1890 80 80 90 or 059-9178990. The website www.workplacerelations.ie also provides information on employment rights.

Social Insurance Fund Review

578. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a system of illness benefit for self-employed persons is now available; the steps that have been taken to implement same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13556/18]

579. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the proposed illness benefit for self-employed persons will be introduced; the reason this has been delayed; if impediments to its introduction have been identified; the funding that has been provided for the scheme in 2018; the qualifying criteria; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13564/18]

590. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which a person that is self-employed may avail of illness benefit; the amount of benefit a person that is self employed may claim; the duration they may claim for; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13821/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I propose to take Questions Nos. 578, 579 and 590 together.

Self-employed persons are liable for PRSI at the Class S rate of 4% which covers them for access to long-term benefits such as State pension (contributory) and widow’s, widower’s or surviving civil partner’s pension (contributory) as well as some treatment benefits, maternity

and paternity benefit, adoptive benefit and guardians payment (contributory). Class S contributions do not provide access to short-term social insurance benefits such as illness benefit. However, the means tested supplementary welfare allowance scheme may be available to those who are experiencing financial difficulty. Self-employed contributors have been covered for invalidity pension since December 2017. This gives the self-employed access to a safety-net of income supports if they become permanently incapable of work as a result of a long-term illness or disability without a means test.

I have already indicated the Government's intention to examine the further extension of benefits to self-employed people. In doing this, it will take account of results of the 2017 survey of self-employed workers, which indicated that self-employed people are open to paying a higher rate of social insurance in return for additional benefits, and the actuarial review of the social insurance fund which was undertaken by KPMG and published last year.

The actuarial review found that the combined cost of introducing the invalidity, illness, job-seeker's and carer's benefits for class S contributions is estimated to be €118 million in 2018, rising to €223 million in 2020. The review indicated that PRSI rates for the self-employed would need to increase from the current level of 4% to 7.8% to ensure a revenue neutral outcome.

Carer's Allowance Eligibility

580. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if there is a situation in which a portion of the income of one spouse which is directed into a legally formed trust fund for a dependant child or adult with a serious disability is not reckonable as part of the means test of the carer's allowance for the other spouse that is a full time carer for that dependant child or adult. [13590/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department operates a range of means tested social assistance payments. The means test takes account of the income and assets of the person (and spouse/partner, if applicable) applying for the relevant scheme. Income and assets include income from employment, self-employment, occupational pensions, maintenance payments as well as property owned (other than the family home) and capital such as savings, shares and other investments.

The purpose of means testing payments is to ensure that resources are directed to those with the most financial need, with the expectation that those with resources will use them to support themselves. The weekly entitlement of the person is the maximum weekly rate of payment for the relevant family less the means calculated. In calculating the means of a person, outgoings such as rent, mortgage payments or, as in this case, monies going in to a trust fund are not disregarded.

It should be noted that the income disregard and means test for carers is one of the most generous within the social protection system. The amount of weekly income that is currently not taken into account is €332.50. In the case of the income of a couple, the first €665 of their combined weekly income is disregarded.

In the case of funds on trust, the key issue for means testing purposes is the ownership of such funds. Trust funds which are owned by a child of a claimant are not assessable on a capital basis when determining the means of a parent who is a welfare claimant. Once monies are placed into a trust fund for another person, the capital value of that trust fund is not assessable if the claimant is no longer the owner of the funds.

Public Services Card

581. **Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the specific section of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 that legislates for public services cards. [13613/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): SAFE Level 2 registration is carried out by my Department and allows a person to verify their identity once, not just for access to services provided by the Department but also for an increasing number of public services. Once a person completes a SAFE 2 registration, they may be issued with a Public Services Card (PSC) as a physical token that proves they have had their identity verified to the SAFE 2 standard.

It is designed to replace other cards within the public sector such as the free travel pass and the social services card of this Department and to make it easy for providers of public services to verify the identity of customers. Completion of registration to SAFE Level 2, which provides a substantial level of assurance of identity, is the minimum requirement for a PSC to issue.

The primary legislative provisions for SAFE registration and identity verification are set out in the Social Welfare Consolidation Act, 2005 (as amended) as follows:

- Sections 262 and 263B provide for the verification of identity for issuance and use of a PPS Number; and
- Sections 263, 263A and 263B provide for the verification of identity for issuance, use and cancellation of a PSC.

Pensions Reform

582. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the new method for calculating pensions will be introduced; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13615/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): A policy to introduce the Total Contributions Approach (TCA) to pensions calculation was adopted by Government in the National Pensions Framework in 2010, as was the decision to base the entitlements of all new pensioners on this approach from around 2020. The Government has confirmed its intention to proceed with that policy in its recently published Roadmap for Pensions Reform. To that end, and to inform the final design of the system, a public consultation will be conducted later this year, and the necessary legislative, technical and administrative arrangements will be determined and developed thereafter.

The Government also announced in January that those affected by the 2012 rateband changes will also have the option of availing of a TCA-based pension, if it is to their advantage. The TCA model being made available to them will award a maximum rate pension for those with 40 years contributions (including up to 20 years HomeCaring credits), and pro-rata payments for those with fewer contributions. Up to 10 years ordinary credits (e.g. for Jobseekers or Illness Benefit) may also be used, subject to the total number of HomeCaring and ordinary credits not exceeding 20 years.

The new TCA for pensioners assessed under the 2012 rate band changes, comes into effect from the 30th March 2018. Pensioners do not need to contact the Department at this juncture. Instead, the Department will invite pensioners, who were assessed under the current rate bands

in place since 2012, to have their pensions recalculated under TCA to determine if they qualify for a higher rate of entitlement. However legislation has to be drafted and enacted to enable implementation of these arrangements and IT solutions in line with this legislation must be developed. Accordingly, it is planned that the reviews will commence in the 4th Quarter of this year, with the first payments being made in the 1st Quarter of 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Benefits Waiting Times

583. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the wait times for claims decisions, reviews and appeals by scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13724/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested by the Deputy, where available, is detailed in the attached in the following tabular statements. Please note that ‘wait times for reviews by scheme’ is not currently a defined metric.

Average Weeks to Award As at end February 2018	
State Pension Contributory	4
State Pension Non-Contributory	12
Jobseeker’s Benefit	1
Jobseeker’s Allowance	2
One-Parent Family Payment	5
Widow(er)’s Contributory Pension	3
Disability Allowance	15
Illness Benefit	1
Invalidity Pension	6
Carer’s Allowance	18
Child Benefit	4
Household Benefits	1
Free Travel	3
Domiciliary Care Allowance	10
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	1

Appeal Processing Times by Scheme 01 January 2018 - 28 February 2018

	Average processing times (weeks) Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks) Oral Hearings
Carers Allowance	23.8	27.8
Carers Benefit	22.4	30.8
Disability Allowance	20.4	25.5
Illness Benefit	30.5	43.3
Partial Capacity Benefit	26.3	22.2
Farm Assist	26.8	53.1
Working Family Payment	28.7	28.4
Invalidity Pension	26.5	24.6

	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
Maternity Benefit	20.7	51.3
Paternity Benefit	29.8	-
One Parent Family Payment	30.5	34.9
State Pension (Contributory)	38.9	50.7
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	31.9	45.2
Occupational Injury Benefit	39.4	44.0
Guardian's Payment (Con)	36.8	-
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	4.7	-
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	30.4	37.4
Jobseeker's Allowance (Payments)	24.6	32.6
Back To Work Family Dividend	29.9	-
Jobseeker's Transitional	-	38.3
Pre-retirement Allowance	-	29.9
Jobseeker's Benefit	22.7	26.0
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	23.8	25.5
Survivor's Pension (Contributory)	34.2	-
Survivor's Pension (Non-Con)	-	32.7

Social Welfare Payments Administration

584. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of payments of disability allowance and children's allowance to persons (details supplied); and if they are due the electricity allowance. [13731/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): I confirm that the first named person is currently receiving his full entitlement of Disability Allowance (DA). The first payment issued to him on 14 February 2018. He is also in receipt of the Household Benefits Package (HHB) which includes the electricity allowance of €1.15 per day (which is paid directly to his electricity provider) and the free TV Licence.

A revised decision in this gentleman's case has resulted in an overpayment being assessed against him in respect of DA payments he received while absent from the State. An appeal against this decision is currently with the Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO) and an oral appeal hearing is being scheduled. The person concerned will be informed when arrangements for the oral hearing have been made.

Child Benefit is currently in payment to the second named person. The most recent payment issued on 8 March 2018. There are no arrears of Child Benefit due.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

State Pension (Contributory) Appeals

585. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a person (details supplied) can further appeal their application for a State (contributory) pension; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13738/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I have been notified by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer having considered all of the available evidence before her, disallowed the state pension (contributory) appeal of the person concerned on 16th March 2017 on the grounds that the person concerned did not have sufficient reckonable contributions or credits over the period from their date of entry into insurable employment in 1967 to 2016 to qualify for a full pension. The person concerned was notified of the Appeals Officer's decision on 22nd March 2017.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

The Social Welfare Appeals system is underpinned by Chapter 2 of Part 10 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act, 2005 and the Social Welfare (Appeals) Regulations 1998 (SI 108/98). This legislation sets down the roles, powers, functions etc. of the Social Welfare Appeals Office and its Appeals Officers. Appeals Officers and the Social Welfare Appeals Office are required to operate within the powers and boundaries set down in this legislation.

Under the legislation, the decision of an Appeals Officer is final and conclusive and may only be reviewed under Section 317 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 by an Appeals Officer in the light of new evidence or new facts. In this case, no further evidence relating to the insurance record of the person concerned has, to date, been submitted to the Appeals Office for further consideration.

The Chief Appeals Officer has power under Section 318 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 to revise any decision where it appears to her that the Appeals Officer's decision was erroneous by reason of some mistake having been made in relation to the law or the facts. A request for such a review by the Chief Appeals Officer may be made by writing to her at the Social Welfare Appeals Office, D'Olier House, D'Olier Street, Dublin 2. If the person concerned decides to take this course of action, it will be necessary for the person to set down specifically the reasons why he believes the Appeals Officer's decision to be incorrect having regard to her interpretation or application of the law or the facts.

The Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (Section 327) also provides that any person who is dissatisfied with either the decision of the Appeals Officer or of a revised decision made by the Chief Appeals Officer may appeal that decision or revised decision, as the case may be, to the High Court on any question of law.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Social Welfare Payments Administration

586. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the average processing time for all social welfare payments in each of the years 2012

to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13756/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The information requested by the Deputy is detailed in the attached in the following tabular statement.

Average Weeks to Award	Feb-18	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
State Pension Contributory	4	5	7	5	5	5	6
State Pension Non-Contributory	12	12	14	14	13	16	12
Jobseeker's Benefit	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
Jobseeker's Allowance	2	2	2	2	2	3	4
One-Parent Family Payment	5	6	6	9	11	13	15
Widow(er)'s Contributory Pension	3	1	2	2	2	2	2
Disability Allowance	15	11	12	11	12	28	19
Illness Benefit	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Invalidity Pension	6	6	10	8	9	51	35
Carer's Allowance	18	14	19	15	13	30	25
Child Benefit	4	3	2	3	2	3	3
Working Family Payment	2	3	4	4	4	7	16
Household Benefits	1	1	2	3	2	2	2
Free Travel	3	2	2	3	2	1	2
Domiciliary Care Allowance	10	17	14	13	10	7	6
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Social Welfare Appeals Waiting Times

587. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the average waiting time for a decision on appeal for social protection payments paid on a weekly basis in cases in which there is no oral hearing and in which there is an oral hearing in each of the years 2012 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13757/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The

tables provide the details which have been requested by the Deputy for the years 2012 to 2017 and to the end of February 2018. They only include the appeal processing times for schemes paid on a weekly basis.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

All claim decisions taken by the Department's deciding officers are appealable to the Chief Appeals Officer. In any year about 85% of all claims are awarded and just 1% are appealed. Nevertheless, the Department is concerned that these cases are dealt with as quickly as possible.

Accordingly, significant efforts and resources have been devoted to reforming the appeal process in recent years. As a result, appeal processing times in respect of all schemes improved between 2011 and 2017 from 52.5 weeks for an oral hearing in 2011 to 26.4 weeks in 2017 and from 25.1 weeks for a summary decision in 2011 to 19.8 weeks in 2017.

The time taken to process an appeal reflects a number of factors including that the appeals process is a quasi-judicial process with appeals officers being required to decide all appeals on a 'de-novo' basis. In addition, appeals decisions are themselves subject to review by the higher courts and decisions have to be formally written up to quasi-judicial standards.

Other factors that influence appeals processing times include the quality of the initial decision – in this respect the Department has changed the decisions process in respect of medical schemes, in order to provide more information to the claimant. I expect that this will help to reduce the number of appeals over time.

In addition, a number of new appeals officers have joined the Appeals Office over the past year, to replace staff leaving on retirement. Given the complexity of the appeals process it takes some time for new staff to be trained up and develop expertise. This changeover in staff led to longer times to conclude appeals in 2017 and this has continued in the first two months of 2018. However, the Chief Appeals Officer has advised that she is hopeful that processing times will improve over the course of 2018.

Finally, it should be noted that an appellant can claim supplementary welfare allowance pending the outcome of their appeal and that any favourable decisions are backdated to the original date of the claim.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Appeals Processing Times by Weekly Paid Scheme 01/01/2012 – 31/12/2012

	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
Adoptive Benefit	27.7	40.4
Blind Pension	24.4	34.7
Carers Allowance	33.5	42.5
Carers Benefit	27.3	35.3
Disability Allowance	34.2	40.6
Illness Benefit	41.9	50.3
Deserted Wives Benefit	27.6	45.4
Deserted Wives Allowance	24.5	39.5
Farm Assist	23.4	44.9

	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
Family Income Supplement *	22.8	31.2
Invalidity Pension	38.8	48.7
One Parent Family Payment	29.4	44.6
Maternity Benefit	30.8	41.7
State Pension (Contributory)	33.2	59.4
State Pension (Non-Con)	27.7	51.1
State Pension (Transition)	25.1	49.1
Occupational Injury Benefit	19.5	66.9
Occupational Injury Benefit (Medical)	78.7	87.4
Incapacity Supplement	14.2	48.8
Guardian's Payment (Con- tributory)	25.8	49.1
Guardian's Payment (Non- Con)	32.0	58.8
Pre-Retirement Allowance	54.6	-
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	22.8	38.2
Jobseeker's Allowance	24.4	34.4
Jobseeker's Benefit	20.9	30.8
Supplementary Welfare Al- lowance	17.6	22.9
Survivor's Pension (Con- tributory)	27.1	60.5
Survivor's Pension (Non- Contributory)	30.9	39.1

* Now known as Working Family Payment **tables ctd.**

Appeals Processing Times by Weekly Paid Scheme 01/01/2013 - 31/12/2013

	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
Adoptive Benefit	34.2	-
Blind Pension	24.6	16.1
Carers Allowance	27.9	33.5
Carers Benefit	22.5	27.4
Disability Allowance	29.0	36.2
Illness Benefit	37.4	43.3
Deserted Wives Benefit	31.6	26.1
Deserted Wives Allowance	12.2	-
Farm Assist	23.0	28.2
Family Income Supplement*	30.7	41.0
Invalidity Pension	35.0	42.5
One Parent Family Payment	29.4	38.3

Questions - Written Answers

	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
Maternity Benefit	28.4	50.0
Partial Capacity Benefit	39.2	38.1
State Pension (Contributory)	26.4	44.5
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	26.8	41.9
State Pension (Transition)	23.7	43.2
Occupational Injury Benefit	36.1	54.1
Incapacity Supplement	25.8	60.8
Guardian's Payment (Contributory)	21.9	44.9
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	45.5	27.5
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	21.2	29.7
Jobseeker's Allowance	20.5	26.7
Jobseeker's Benefit	21.1	28.9
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	17.1	24.1
Survivor's Pension (Contributory)	26.4	39.2
Survivor's Pension (Non-Con)	28.0	38.5

* Now known as Working Family Payment

Appeals Processing Times by Weekly Paid Scheme 01/01/2014 - 31/12/14

	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
Adoptive Benefit	17.1	-
Blind Pension	20.5	24.9
Carers Allowance	30.1	34.4
Carers Benefit	22.9	23.1
Disability Allowance	20.8	26.7
Illness Benefit	29.5	34.8
Deserted Wives Benefit	-	64.7
Deserted Wives Allowance	-	41.8
Farm Assist	23.2	28.3
Family Income Supplement*	26.0	32.6
Invalidity Pension	25.9	31.2
One Parent Family Payment	24.4	33.5
Maternity Benefit	22.4	44.7
Partial Capacity Benefit	48.5	48.5
State Pension (Contributory)	25.2	41.9
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	20.3	29.4

	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
State Pension (Transition)	27.0	35.1
Occupational Injury Benefit	33.6	33.7
Incapacity Supplement	21.5	59.6
Guardian's Payment (Contributory)	25.9	24.9
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	19.7	30.3
Pre-Retirement Allowance	17.3	-
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	18.1	27.5
Jobseeker's Allowance	16.2	21.1
Jobseeker's Benefit	16.7	21.1
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	14.4	22.1
Survivor's Pension (Contributory)	20.2	32.5
Survivor's Pension (Non-Con)	24.7	24.6

* Now known as Working Family Payment

tables ctd.

Appeals Processing Times by Weekly Paid Scheme 01/01/2015 – 31/12/2015

	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
Blind Person's Pension	21.1	30.7
Carers Allowance	20.6	25.9
Carers Benefit	19.7	21.8
Disability Allowance	15.8	21.4
Illness Benefit	26.3	33.1
Partial Capacity Benefit	25.7	43.4
Deserted Wives Benefit	19.7	26.2
Deserted Wives Allowance	-	16.2
Farm Assist	21.0	28.6
Family Income Supplement*	19.4	27.7
Invalidity Pension	26.2	28.4
Maternity Benefit	22.6	17.5
One Parent Family Payment	22.9	33.9
State Pension (Contributory)	26.0	46.0
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	20.4	30.8
State Pension (Transition)	80.1	53.4
Occupational Injury Benefit	20.3	35.0
Incapacity Supplement	41.2	51.5

Questions - Written Answers

	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
Guardian's Payment (Contributory)	18.2	27.5
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	18.7	31.0
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	15.8	26.0
Jobseeker's Allowance	15.2	21.9
BTW Family Dividend	14.1	-
Jobseeker's Transitional	12.9	21.3
Jobseeker's Benefit	14.3	21.2
Pre-Retirement Allowance	15.0	-
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	13.1	23.5
Survivor's Pension (Contributory)	24.1	46.6
Survivor's Pension (Non-Contributory)	23.7	38.3

* Now known as Working Family Payment

Appeals Processing Times by Weekly Paid Scheme 01/01/2016 – 31/12/2016

	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
Blind Person's Pension	18.2	33.8
Carers Allowance	17.6	21.6
Carers Benefit	20.7	22.4
Disability Allowance	14.6	20.1
Illness Benefit	27.2	34.3
Partial Capacity Benefit	27.3	33.6
Deserted Wives Benefit	13.0	32.8
Farm Assist	21.9	26.0
Family Income Supplement*	20.4	25.5
Invalidity Pension	21.3	28.2
Maternity Benefit	18.9	21.7
One Parent Family Payment	21.7	31.9
State Pension (Contributory)	25.6	45.9
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	22.7	32.9
State Pension (Transition)	67.7	61.3
Occupational Injury Benefit	25.0	31.9
Incapacity Supplement	27.7	50.9
Guardian's Payment (Contributory)	15.8	24.5
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	18.4	23.3

	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	16.7	25.5
Jobseeker's Allowance	16.0	20.9
BTW Family Dividend	21.0	-
Jobseeker's Transitional	19.0	22.3
Jobseeker's Benefit	16.0	27.2
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	15.0	24.1
Survivor's Pension (Contributory)	16.6	28.8
Survivor's Pension (Non-Con)	18.4	23.4

* Now known as Working Family Payment

Appeals Processing Times by Weekly Paid Scheme 01/01/2017 – 31/12/2017

	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
Adoptive Benefit	13.4	-
Blind Person's Pension	20.1	24.4
Carers Allowance	21.7	24.0
Carers Benefit	17.8	21.3
Disability Allowance	17.3	24.1
Illness Benefit	28.0	30.6
Partial Capacity Benefit	33.3	35.7
Deserted Wives Benefit	13.1	27.7
Farm Assist	20.7	25.8
Family Income Supplement*	22.9	34.6
Invalidity Pension	16.9	23.7
Maternity Benefit	18.8	19.3
Paternity Benefit	18.3	-
One Parent Family Payment	26.1	34.7
State Pension (Contributory)	32.1	45.7
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	25.9	35.3
State Pension (Transition)	60.4	-
Occupational Injury Benefit	20.0	26.4
Incapacity Supplement	47.8	37.2
Guardian's Payment (Contributory)	23.7	27.0
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	16.0	23.1
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	19.6	27.3

Questions - Written Answers

	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
Jobseeker's Allowance	18.3	24.8
BTW Family Dividend	19.8	27.5
Jobseeker's Transitional	22.1	23.2
Jobseeker's Benefit	20.6	24.2
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	16.4	25.8
Survivor's Pension (Contributory)	23.0	44.7
Survivor's Pension (Non-Con)	23.3	24.7

* Now known as Working Family Payment

Appeal Processing Times by Weekly Paid Scheme 01 January 2018 - 28 February 2018

	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
Carers Allowance	23.8	27.8
Carers Benefit	22.4	30.8
Disability Allowance	20.4	25.5
Illness Benefit	30.5	43.3
Partial Capacity Benefit	26.3	22.2
Farm Assist	26.8	53.1
Working Family Payment	28.7	28.4
Invalidity Pension	26.5	24.6
Maternity Benefit	20.7	51.3
Paternity Benefit	29.8	-
One Parent Family Payment	30.5	34.9
State Pension (Contributory)	38.9	50.7
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	31.9	45.2
Occupational Injury Benefit	39.4	44.0
Guardian's Payment (Con)	36.8	-
Guardian's Payment (Non-Con)	4.7	-
Jobseeker's Allowance (Means)	30.4	37.4
Jobseeker's Allowance (Payments)	24.6	32.6
Back To Work Family Dividend	29.9	-
Jobseeker's Transitional	-	38.3
Pre-Retirement Allowance	-	29.9
Jobseeker's Benefit	22.7	26.0
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	23.8	25.5

	Average processing times (weeks)Summary Decisions	Average processing times (weeks)Oral Hearings
Survivor's Pension (Contributory)	34.2	-
Survivor's Pension (Non-Con)	-	32.7

Disability Allowance Applications

588. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a full review will be carried out on the case of a person (details supplied). [13801/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath): A review has been carried out on this customer application for Disability Allowance (DA) and the increase for qualified adult has been awarded from the Wednesday after she returned. The weekly rate of payment is now €165.50. Arrears of allowance due issued on 23 March 2018.

In relation to the assessment of the property it has been reviewed and is still deemed as assessable at half the value. The property is not personally used or enjoyed by the customer and as such could be put to profitable use.

A letter regarding the revised decision has issued to the customer on the 23 March 2018. It is open to him to request a review or an appeal of this decision.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy

Pension Provisions

589. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 273 of 8 February 2018 and 539 of 20 February 2018, if provision is made in her Department's budget to meet the pension liability for persons entitled to claim a pension benefit as a result of Directive 2010/41/EU; if forecasting for payments of that aspect of pension payment has been undertaken; the amount paid to date as a result of the directive; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13802/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Self-employed workers who earn €5,000 or more in a contribution year, including those brought into social insurance as a result of Directive 2010/14/EU, are liable for PRSI at the class S rate of 4%, subject to a minimum annual payment of €500. This provides them with access to the following benefits: State pension (contributory), widow's, widower's or surviving civil partner's pension (contributory), guardian's payment (contributory), maternity benefit, adoptive benefit, paternity benefit, treatment benefit (from March 2017). Entitlement to invalidity pension was extended to the self-employed from December 2017.

It is not possible to assess the specific cost of State pension (contributory) to those affected by the implementation of the provision as it is not possible to identify these "assisting relatives". They make a normal Class S self-employed contribution and qualify for social welfare entitlements on that basis. However, at the time of the introduction of the provision, numbers affected were thought to be relatively small. Census 2011 data suggested that prior to the change, the exclusion from social insurance affected less than 6,000 assisting spouses/civil partners who

assist in family businesses. The 2011 data indicated that there were 5,872 “assisting relatives” of which 3,315 were female and 2,557 were male. Some of these “assisting relatives” could have been family members other than spouses/civil partners.

In addition, many spouses/civil partners who were affected by the exclusion from social insurance and who gained access to State pension contributory in their own right, may already have been entitled to the means tested increase for a qualified adult. Therefore the incremental costs of entitlement to State pension contributory are unlikely to be significant.

Question No. 590 answered with Question No. 578.

Employment Support Services

591. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the reason persons in receipt of carer’s allowance are not eligible for a grant (details supplied) in view of the fact they are able to work 15 hours per week; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13883/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The purpose of the Technical Employment Support Grant (TESG) now known as the Training Support Grant (TSG) is designed to fund quick access to short term training or related interventions, obtain/renew certification/permits for individual jobseekers looking to exit the live register. The grant is awarded where Case Officers have identified an immediate skills gap that represents an obstacle to taking up a job offer or accessing other activation interventions.

The TSG scheme is not designed to substitute training and activation measures that are provided under other programmes and agencies (Solas/Education Training Boards) or actions that are funded as part of other programmes.

The objective of the TSG Scheme is to provide Case Officers with financial resources to respond to identified training needs of Jobseekers that are focused on obtaining work, in line with their agreed personal progression plan.

While the primary focus of the scheme is on jobseekers and on supporting the activation policy of the Department, TSG may be used to support a person in receipt of Carer’s Allowance to secure employment and to assist jobseekers exiting the Carer’s Allowance scheme.

Jobseeker’s Allowance Applications

592. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an application by a person (details supplied) for jobseeker’s allowance will be re-examined; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13915/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The person concerned Jobseeker’s Allowance claim will be re-examined and in this regard the client has been requested to submit information in support of his claim.

The person concerned has also submitted a claim for Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA). However, the Designated Person who is dealing with the claim has made several attempts to contact the client with regard to his application but without success, but they will continue with efforts to progress the claim.

I trust that this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Applications

593. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance review for a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13918/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Carer's Allowance (CA) is a means-tested payment, made to a person providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that they require that level of care. An increased payment can be made where full-time care is being provided to two people.

I confirm that my department received an application for CA from the person concerned on the 25 September 2017.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and the deciding officer decided that although a certain level of care was being provided the level involved did not amount to full-time care.

The person concerned was notified on 25 January 2018 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

A review of this decision was sought on 23 February 2018. The outcome of the review is that the original decision remains unchanged.

The person concerned was notified on 7 March 2018 of the outcome and of her right of appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Payments

594. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if there will be an increase in the electricity allowance under the household benefits package to recognise the increase in energy prices; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13963/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The household benefits package comprises the electricity/gas allowance (€35 per month) and the free television licence scheme (€160 per annum). At present, it is paid to some 436,000 customers, with expenditure estimated at €237 million for 2018.

The package is generally available to people living in the State, aged 66 years or over who are in receipt of a social welfare type payment or who satisfy a means test. The package is also available to carers and people with disabilities under the age of 66 who are in receipt of certain welfare type payments. Widows and widowers aged from 60 to 65 whose late spouses had been in receipt of the household benefits package retain that entitlement.

My Department also pays fuel allowance scheme to over 365,000 customers at an estimate cost of €227 million in 2018.

On the occasion of the most recent budgets, the Government has chosen to concentrate

resources on increasing the rate of the pension and other weekly payments. In Budget 2018 I increased the maximum rate of all weekly payments by €5. This is the third increase in the rate of state pensions in recent years and will increase the personal rate of the non-contributory pension to €232, and that of the contributory pension to €243.30. There was also a €2.50 increase in the rate of the Fuel Allowance in 2016 from €20 to €22.50 per week and in budget 2018 I increased the period fuel allowance is paid for to 27 weeks.

Taking this into consideration I have no plans to increase the electricity/gas allowance element of the household benefits package at this time. Any decision to increase the benefits under the household benefits package would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 595 withdrawn.

Public Services Card

596. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the exact date invitations to register for a public services card were first sent by her Department to persons who have been registered to SAFE 2 standard by the National Driver Licence Service; if the information used to identify persons who do not have a public services card but are SAFE authenticated and invite these persons to register for a card is obtained by her Department from the Road Safety Authority or the National Driver Licence Service; if a data sharing agreement exists between her Department and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, the Road Safety Authority or the National Driver Licence Service; and if so, the date of this agreement. [14003/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The National Driver Licence Service (NDLS) does not register its customers to SAFE 2 standard. However, it does authenticate customer identities in a face-to-face engagement, including the capture of a photograph.

In August 2017, my Department commenced inviting NDLS customers to complete SAFE 2 registration by post. Invites were only issued to customers whose Public Services Identity data, supplied to the NDLS, matched the data held on the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection's system and whose interaction with the NDLS had taken place since March 2014. This eliminated the need for the invitee to attend at an Intreo centre or a dedicated SAFE Registration centre specifically for the purpose of registering to SAFE 2.

If the customer chose to avail of this option, they were required to complete the form supplied with the invitation. If the customer chose not to complete the process, no further invite was issued.

As part of the process, the customer also had to consent to the Department using the photograph, already captured in a face-to-face interaction with the NDLS to complete the SAFE 2 process. Once the customer has completed the SAFE 2 registration process, a Public Services Card may issue.

The legal basis for sharing data is provided in the Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act 2005, as amended and is prescribed to certain specified bodies and only for the purposes of public service transactions. The list of specified bodies that may use PSI data under Sections 260-265 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (as amended) is contained in Schedule 5 of

the Social Welfare Consolidation Act and includes the Department of Transport and the Road Safety Authority.

As Data Controller, for the Public Services Identity, my Department is obligated to ensure, as far as is possible, that the data it holds is accurate, complete and up-to-date. Legislation also provides that, where a specified body collects from a person any of his/her PSI data, that information shall also be collected for the purpose of maintaining the person's public service identity.

A data sharing agreement is currently being formalised with the Department of Transport and the Road Safety Authority, in line with the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation.

I trust this clarifies the issue for the Deputy.

Carer's Allowance Payments

597. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the correct level of carer's allowance payable in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14039/18]

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.

CA was awarded to the person concerned from 3 March 2016 in respect of her mother.

I can confirm that she is currently in receipt of the maximum weekly rate of €209.00.

From 29 March 2018 this rate is due to increase to €214.00 weekly when the 2018 budget increase takes effect.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Fuel Allowance Eligibility

598. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a fuel allowance is payable in the case of a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14045/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): A Fuel Allowance is a payment under the National Fuel Scheme to help with the cost of heating a person's home during the winter months. It is paid to people who are receiving certain qualifying social welfare payments and who are unable to provide for their own heating needs. Carer's allowance is not a qualifying payment.

If the person being cared for is in receipt of a long-term social welfare payment such as disability allowance, invalidity pension or a state pension, they may qualify for Fuel Allowance in their own right.

The cared-for person should apply to the office that administers their long-term social welfare payment.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rural Social Scheme Eligibility

599. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the six year rule will be abolished for participants over the age of 55 years on the rural social scheme, RSS, and Tús; when there will be a revision of the RSS eligibility rules to allow extended members of farming families to participate on the scheme (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14072/18]

607. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the rationale for limiting the time period that a person can spend on the rural social scheme to six years; her plans to abolish this rule particularly for those aged 55 and over; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14164/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 599 and 607 together.

The rural social scheme (RSS) provides opportunities for farmers and fishermen/women who are currently in receipt of specified social welfare payments to work to provide certain services of benefit to rural communities. Communities benefit from the skills and talents of local farmers and fishermen and participants have the opportunity to improve existing skills, or develop new skills, while performing this valuable work in their local communities

Since 1st February 2017, all participants commencing on the RSS have to be over 25 years of age and a 6 year overall participation limit on the work scheme also applies. This new measure ensures that places become available to provide opportunities for other farmers and fishermen to take part in the scheme. There are currently no plans to change the eligibility conditions for persons over 55 years of age. RSS participants who commenced on the scheme prior to 1st February 2017 will remain on the scheme, as long as they continue to remain eligible for the scheme. To be eligible to participate on the RSS, an individual must satisfy the qualifying criteria for the scheme. This includes having an entitlement to one of the qualifying social welfare payments and maintaining an underlying entitlement to Farm/Fish Assist.

Tús provides part-time temporary work in the communities, as a stepping stone back to employment for people on a long term jobseeker's payment. However, Tús placements are not full-time sustainable jobs. Tús is designed to break the cycle of unemployment and maintain work readiness thereby improving a person's opportunities of returning to the labour market. Tús participants work for an average of 19.5 hours a week and placements last for maximum of 12 months.

The twelve month duration of the Tús contract is set to reflect a number of inter-related elements. These include the need to ensure the benefit of participation on a work scheme is available to the widest possible number of jobseekers. There are no plans to extend the scheme to longer than a 12 months duration or change the eligibility conditions for persons over 55 years of age. After three years, a person can become eligible for a further 12 month placement on Tús.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rural Social Scheme

600. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address queries (details supplied) regarding the RSS and Tús; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14073/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Tús is one of a range of supports provided by my Department to cater for long-term unemployed jobseekers and those most distant from the labour market. It provides part-time temporary work in local communities, as a stepping-stone back to employment. However, it is important to note that these placements are not full-time sustainable jobs and are designed to break the cycle of unemployment and maintain work readiness, thereby improving a person's opportunities of returning to the labour market or getting a job for the first time. The scheme commenced operation in 2011 as a response to the high level of unemployment and the large numbers on the Live Register at that time. There are 47 Local Development Companies (LDCs), as well as Údarás na Gaeltachta, involved in the delivery of the Tús programme - known as Implementing bodies (IBs).

The Deputy will appreciate that the reduction in the unemployment rate is a factor in recruitment to all programmes. Long-term unemployment is expected to fall further this year in line with the continuing forecasted fall in overall unemployment.

The Deputy will appreciate that given the welcome improvements in the labour market in recent years with reducing numbers of long-term unemployed on the Live Register, which is the target cohort for Tús, it is proving difficult to fill the number of places available nationwide. However, changes were introduced recently to the selection criteria for Tús which should broaden the availability of Tús to a greater number of people on the live register. This includes an increase in the percentage of assisted referrals from 20% to 30%, as well as permitting someone who has had a break of up to 30 days on the Live Register in the past 12 months to be considered eligible for Tús selection.

In the five years since the end of December 2012, there has been a 48% fall in the numbers on the Live Register who are more than 1 year unemployed. In this context the Department is currently engaging with the Irish Local Development Network – the representative body for the IBs.

The Department keeps all aspects of its activation programmes under review to ensure the best outcomes for participants and communities.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

JobPath Programme

601. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address queries (details supplied) with regard to JobPath issues and Tús; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14074/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy will be aware, JobPath is a service that supports people who are long-term unemployed to obtain and sustain paid employment. The service was launched in 2015 on a 'rolling basis' with referral numbers gradually increasing over time. The aim of the service is to assist persons who are long term unemployed to find and sustain full-time paid employment in the open labour market. The service assists long-term unemployed people through the provision of career advice, CV preparation support, interview skills training, job search supports and by working closely with employers to source vacancies that can be offered to jobseekers.

The service is distinct from the CE and TÚS schemes which provide part-time work experience and training opportunities as stepping stones back to employment for people on a range of Social Welfare payments. These schemes do not provide full-time sustainable employment in the open labour market.

It is important to note that there are two phases to the JobPath service. During the first phase, of 12 months duration, a personal advisor (PA) provides practical assistance in searching, preparing for, securing and sustaining employment. The second phase starts if the jobseeker is successful in finding work. During this phase the PA continues to work with the jobseeker for a further period of at least three months, and up to 12 months. In addition to the two phases jobseekers may also undertake training while with the service and this may extend the period the jobseeker is supported through the service for up to a further 6 months. The duration of the client journey therefore necessitates the requirement of a cohort based approach to reporting and the updating of individual cohort outcome data over time, as and when more jobseekers complete their engagement period with the service.

My Department has published initial cohort based reports on the performance of the service, with the latest being published on welfare.ie in January 2018. This report detailed employment outcomes for customer cohorts referred in Quarter 3 and 4 in 2015 and those referred in Quarter 1 and 2 in 2016.

Of the 39,603 jobseekers referred to the service during this period, 58% were over three years unemployed and a further 17% were over two years unemployed. These groups face significant barriers when seeking to enter or return to employment in the open labour market.

The total employment outcome across all four cohorts at the time of publishing was 25%: 18% of Jobseekers who engaged with the service during this period obtained full-time employment, in addition a further 4% of clients entered part-time employment and a further 3% became self-employed. It is important to note, that the latter two cohorts (Q1 and Q2 2016), represent 80% of the 39,603 jobseekers referred between July 2015 and June 2016, and the employment outcomes are expected to improve over time as more jobseekers from these cohorts complete their full engagement period with the service.

The figures presented for JobPath provided by the Deputy are misconceived as they do not correctly relate to the service and as they seek to compare the service and the participation costs for other schemes, this is to misunderstand the service. However taking the deputies approach, the cost per jobseeker supported by the service in the period between July 2015 and June 2016, can be estimated by taking the numbers who participated during the period (circa 39,600 jobseekers) and the payments from the Department during the same period (which amounted to approximately €11.6m) giving a cost per participant of approximately €300.

The actual cost of the service, over the term of the contract, will be determined by a combination of factors such as, the profile of jobseekers on the live register, the number of people who are referred to the service by the Department and critically, the number of Jobseekers who are successfully placed into sustainable full time paid employment.

It should also be noted that the quoted amounts paid in fees to JobPath providers to date are gross figures i.e. the associated savings in social welfare payments have not been deducted. This is a key feature of a payment by results model of contracting which has been undertaken with regards to JobPath: i.e. job sustainment fee payments are only made were a jobseeker has obtained and sustained paid employment of 13, 26, 39 and 52 weeks duration were the former jobseeker was not entitled to a jobseekers related payment during that period.

Given the extended time a Jobseeker may engage with the service and the increase in refer-

ral numbers over the reported timeframe the results are positive. These initial cohort reports are however subject to review and are based on a relatively small sample size. With this in mind, the department is undertaking an econometric review of this strand of its activation services. Completion of the review is provisionally scheduled for the end of Q3 2018, following which more detailed and robust statistics will be available.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Tús Programme

602. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address queries (details supplied) with regard to extending Tús participation; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14075/18]

611. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the rationale for the one year limit a person can spend on Tús; her plans to extend this to two years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14168/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): I propose to take Questions Nos. 602 and 611 together.

Tús is one of a range of supports provided by my Department to cater for long-term unemployed jobseekers and those most distant from the labour market. It provides part-time temporary work in local communities, as a stepping-stone back to employment. However, it is important to note that these placements are not full-time sustainable jobs and are designed to break the cycle of unemployment and maintain work readiness, thereby improving a person's opportunities of returning to the labour market or getting a job for the first time. The Deputies will appreciate that the welcome reduction in the unemployment rate is a factor in recruitment to all programmes. Long-term unemployment is expected to fall further this year in line with the continuing forecasted fall in overall unemployment.

Currently, participants can remain on Tús for one year and I have no plans to change this. However, changes were introduced recently to the selection criteria for Tús which should broaden the availability of Tús to a greater number of people on the live register. This includes an increase in the percentage of assisted referrals from 20% to 30%, as well as permitting someone who has had a break of up to 30 days on the Live Register in the past 12 months to be considered eligible for Tús selection.

The Department keeps all aspects of its activation programmes under review to ensure the best outcomes for participants and communities. The Government is very mindful of the large number of work programme places involved in service delivery and other valuable services around the country.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputies.

Free Travel Scheme Eligibility

603. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection her plans to award free travel passes to persons with epilepsy and their travel companions in view of the fact that many are banned from driving and are advised by doctors not to cycle and not to use public transport unaccompanied; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14102/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The current free travel scheme provides free travel on the main public and private transport services for those eligible under the scheme. These include road, rail and ferry services provided by companies such as Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann, as well as Luas and services provided by almost 80 private transport operators. There are approximately 904,000 customers in receipt of free travel.

Persons resident in Ireland who are over 66 and persons in receipt of certain social welfare payments are eligible for the scheme. The social welfare payments that allow persons aged under 66 to a free travel pass include disability allowance, invalidity pension, carer's allowance and partial capacity benefit. Disability allowance and invalidity pension are both long term illness payments, and so people in receipt of those payments will already have eligibility.

For a customer to receive a companion pass they would have to be assessed as medically unfit to travel alone.

There are currently no plans to change the eligibility criteria of the free travel scheme to include persons who are not paid a benefit by my Department.

If the free travel scheme was to be extended to people who are not eligible for a qualifying payment, an assessment process would be required for all such applications, changing the nature of the scheme. Successive Governments have instead used existing underlying entitlements to confer eligibility for this scheme.

In addition, any decision to extend the free travel scheme to persons who are not in receipt of a primary qualifying payment would have to be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme (SWA) the Department of Social Protection may award a travel supplement in any case where the circumstances of the case so warrant. The supplement is intended to assist with ongoing or recurring travel costs that cannot be met from the client's own resources and are deemed to be necessary. Every decision is based on consideration of the circumstances of the case, taking account of the nature and extent of the need and of the resources of the person concerned.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Pension Provisions

604. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when the recent decisions to allow homemakers pre-1994 to discount those years from pension calculations will be enacted; when women will benefit from same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14109/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): A policy to introduce the Total Contributions Approach (TCA) to pensions calculation was adopted by Government in the National Pensions Framework in 2010, as was the decision to base the entitlements of all new pensioners on this approach from around 2020. The Government has confirmed its intention to proceed with that policy in its recently published Roadmap for Pensions Reform. To that end, and to inform the final design of the system, a public consultation will be conducted later this year, and the necessary legislative, technical and administrative arrangements will be determined and developed thereafter.

The Government also announced in January that those affected by the 2012 rateband changes will have the option of availing of a TCA-based pension, if it is to their advantage. The TCA model being made available to them will award a maximum rate pension for those with 40 years contributions (including up to 20 years HomeCaring credits), and pro-rata payments for those with fewer contributions. Up to 10 years ordinary credits (e.g. for Jobseekers or Illness Benefit) may also be used, subject to the total number of HomeCaring and ordinary credits not exceeding 20 years. This approach is expected to significantly benefit many people, particularly women, whose work history includes an extended period of time outside the paid workplace, while raising families or in a caring role.

The new TCA for pensioners assessed under the 2012 rate band changes, comes into effect from the 30th March 2018. Pensioners do not need to contact the Department at this juncture. Instead, the Department will invite pensioners, who were assessed under the current rate bands in place since 2012, to have their pensions recalculated under TCA to determine if they qualify for a higher rate of entitlement. However legislation has to be drafted and enacted to enable implementation of these arrangements and IT solutions in line with this legislation must be developed. Accordingly, it is planned that the reviews will commence in the 4th quarter of this year, with the first payments being made in the 1st quarter of 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Community Employment Schemes Data

605. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of community employment schemes currently in place; the detail of the schemes being run; the location of each; the number of persons on each scheme; the number of vacant places on each scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14142/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The following tables give the breakdown of Community Employment (CE) projects as requested by the Deputy.

Table 1: The number of community employment projects, the detail of the project type being run and the number of persons on each project.

Table 2: Number of community employment projects and Participants/Supervisors/Assistant Supervisors by county.

Table 1: Breakdown of CE Projects by Type as at the end January 2018

Project Type	No. of Projects	Participants	Supervisors	Assistant Supervisors	Total
Dedicated Childcare	5	132	8	4	144
Dedicated Health and Social care	2	50	2	1	53
Drug Rehabilitation	46	1,056	98	37	1,191
Innovatory	1	13	1		14

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Project Type	No. of Projects	Participants	Supervisors	Assistant Supervisors	Total
Mainstream CE	886	20,494	1,001	207	21,702
Grand Total	940	21,745	1,110	249	23,104

Table 2: Number of CE Projects and Participants/Supervisors/Assistant Supervisors by county as at the end January 2018

County	Projects	Participants	Supervisors	Assistant Supervisors	Total
CARLOW	26	571	33	5	609
CAVAN	13	333	14	5	352
CLARE	25	480	26	5	511
CORK	69	1,526	73	6	1,605
DONEGAL	50	1,119	55	4	1,178
DUBLIN	168	4,108	236	75	4,419
GALWAY	63	1,324	66	16	1,406
KERRY	46	1,020	47	5	1,072
KILDARE	47	1,086	57	15	1,158
KILKENNY	21	517	23	7	547
LAOIS	15	312	16		328
LEITRIM	8	191	9	1	201
LIMERICK	52	1,289	63	13	1,365
LONGFORD	14	315	17	2	334
LOUTH	27	781	30	13	824
MAYO	33	745	36	11	792
MEATH	17	483	20	9	512
MONAGHAN	11	410	14	4	428
OFFALY	20	443	21	6	470
ROSCOMMON	16	285	19		304
SLIGO	19	461	27	2	490
TIPPERARY	45	858	49	6	913
WATERFORD	35	758	37	8	803
WESTMEATH	21	598	26	9	633
WEXFORD	45	978	55	10	1,043
WICKLOW	34	754	41	12	807
Grand Total	940	21,745	1,110	249	23,104

According to the JobsIreland website (where all Community Employment (CE) vacancies are advertised), there are approximately 1,500 CE posts vacant on Monday, 26 March 2018. This number is a snapshot in time and will change from day-to-day as places are filled and new vacancies arise as participants exit the programme.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Rural Social Scheme

606. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the cost saving to her Department as a result of the revised model of funding agreed for the rural social scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14163/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Deputies on all sides of the House are fully aware of the positive benefits derived from work schemes like the Rural Social Scheme (RSS). In recognition of the crucial work undertaken in rural communities under the scheme, and as part of the social welfare budget package for 2018, I announced an additional 250 places to be rolled out this year together with an increase in the weekly rate of payment for participants from this week beginning 26 March 2018. Taking into account the 500 additional places already allocated as part of the social welfare budget 2017, this brings the total number of RSS places to 3,350, nearly 30% of an increase in the last two years.

In the context of savings to the Department as a result of the revised model of funding, it should be noted that all Implementing Bodies (IBs) will receive increased funding in 2018, compared to 2017, due to the provision of increased RSS places. A budget of €51.04m is provided for the RSS in 2018. The provisional outturn in 2017 on RSS was €44.4m.

I would like to reiterate that the Government strongly supports the work being done through the RSS and the vital role such schemes are playing in local communities, including supporting social services, across the entire country.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 607 answered with Question No. 599.

JobPath Programme

608. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which participants for JobPath are selected; if there has been a change in this regard; if it is a random selection or a screening process; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14165/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection provides a range of activation supports catering for long-term unemployed jobseekers and those most distant from the labour market to secure and sustain full-time paid employment. These supports include the JobPath service.

For the purposes of the JobPath service all long-term unemployed jobseekers on the Live Register, aged between 18 and 61 years old inclusive, are categorised into groups based on their duration of unemployment (e.g. 1- 2 years, 2 – 3 years etc.). Selection for referral to receive employment activation services from a JobPath provider is by means of system based stratified random sampling using these groupings; the objective being to ensure equity in selection and also that people referred to JobPath are a representative of the long term cohort on the Live Register.

The duration of a person's Jobseekers claim is recorded in terms of days of unemployment. Jobseeker Allowance claims is made up of continuous periods of unemployment. Any two such periods not separated by more than 52 weeks are considered to be the same continuous period of unemployment - this is known as linking the claims. Long-term jobseekers that may have left the live register to go into employment for less than a year are still considered to be long-term if they reopen their claim within that 52 week period. They retain certain entitlements (for example no waiting days and other supplemental benefits) and are also available for selection for activation services including JobPath.

Protocols for referral currently preclude the selection of anyone who has already completed 52 weeks on the JobPath programme within the previous 4 months although in practice it is generally 6 months.. A person who has completed a year with the JobPath service; continues to meet the criteria for long term unemployment and is not engaged in other activation supports and services becomes eligible for selection for a second period of activation with the JobPath service after 4 to 6 months.

I trust this clarifies matters for the Deputy.

Departmental Expenditure

609. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the expenditure on JobPath, Tús, the rural social scheme and community employment schemes in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14166/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): The table shows the expenditure on JobPath, Tús, Rural Social Scheme and Community Employment schemes in each of the years 2015 to 2017 and to date in 2018 in tabular form.

-	2015 Outturn	2016 Outturn	2017 Outturn (Provisional)	2018 YTD end Feb 2018
JobPath	€1.24m	€25.19m	€57.42m	€12.47m
Community Employment	€364.98m	€356.34m	€350.48m	€52.60m
Tús	€124.57m	€118.60m	€109.39m	€18.24m
Rural Social Scheme	€44.10m	€42.39m	€44.40m	€8.16m

JobPath Data

610. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the percentage of participants in each year that have entered full-time employment after participating in JobPath since the scheme commenced, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14167/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): As the Deputy will be aware, JobPath is a service that supports people who are long-term unemployed to obtain and sustain paid employment. The service was launched in 2015 on a 'rolling basis' with referral numbers gradually increasing over time.

There are two phases to the service. During the first phase, of 12 months duration, a personal advisor (PA) provides practical assistance in searching, preparing for, securing and sustaining employment. The second phase starts if the jobseeker is successful in finding work. During this phase the PA continues to work with the jobseeker for a further period of at least three months, and up to 12 months. In addition to the two phases jobseekers may also undertake training while with the service and this may extend the period the jobseeker is supported through the service for up to a further 6 months.

The total number of clients who commenced an employment each year since service was launched is shown in the following table –

Year	Commenced Full-time Employment	Commenced Part-time Employment	Total Clients commencing Employment
2015	1,371	289	1,660
2016	11,839	2,235	14,074
2017	13,609	1,321	14,930
2018	216	17	233
Total	27,035	3,862	30,897

*2018 figures are up to end of February.

To facilitate the Deputy in gaining an overview of the service I would call her attention to the published results for the service covering those referred between July 2015 and June 2016. These published reports provide information on customers who not only commenced employment but sustained employment. The Department was careful in designing the service to ensure that payments to contractors are conditional on Jobseekers not just finding a job but finding and sustaining their employment. The companies are, for example, only paid a job outcome fee for each 13 week period of sustained employment of at least 30 hours per week.

It should also be noted that jobseekers are supported by the service for up to 30 months and as such the duration of the client journey necessitates the requirement of a cohort based approach to reporting in order to produce accurate outcome data. For this reason, the number of clients entering employment is expected to increase in time.

The Department is undertaking an econometric review of this strand of its activation services. Completion of the review is provisionally scheduled for the end of the third quarter 2018, following which more detailed and robust statistics will be available.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

Question No. 611 answered with Question No. 602.

Community Employment Schemes Eligibility

612. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of years or length of time participants can spend on community employment, the rural social scheme, Tús and JobPath; the length of time a person has to wait before he or she can reapply for the same scheme; and if the Minister will make a statement on the matter. [14169/18]

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty): Following the publication in April 2017 of my Department's report entitled 'An Analysis of the Community Employment Programme', the Government approved a number of changes to the terms and conditions around participation on Community Employment (CE). The main purpose of these changes 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.

The changes for those on the live register see the general qualifying age for CE reduced from 25 to 21 years and are effective from 3rd July 2017. It will also be easier for previous participants who have exhausted their CE entitlement to requalify as participation prior to the year 2007 will be disregarded. While participants between 21 and 55 years can avail of one year on

the programme, this can be extended on approval by the Department by up to 2 more years, if they are working towards a major award/industry recognised equivalent to support their progression to employment. CE participants aged 55 and over can now avail of up to 3 consecutive years on a scheme. An overall lifetime limit of 6 years will apply to CE participants (7 years if on a disability payment). A person may re-qualify for CE after 12 months of being in receipt of a qualifying social welfare payment, provided they have not reached their 6 year limit. All CE places are now categorised into one of two strands, either activation, with a target progression of 50%, or social inclusion, with a target progression of 20%.

The rural social scheme (RSS) provides opportunities for farmers and fishermen/women who are currently in receipt of specified social welfare payments to work to provide certain services of benefit to rural communities. Communities benefit from the skills and talents of local farmers and fishermen and participants have the opportunity to improve existing skills, or develop new skills, while performing this valuable work in their local communities

Since 1st February 2017, all participants commencing on the RSS have to be over 25 years of age and a 6 year overall participation limit on the work scheme also applies. This new measure ensures that places become available to provide opportunities for other farmers and fishermen to take part in the scheme. RSS participants who commenced on the scheme prior to 1st February 2017 will remain on the scheme, as long as they continue to remain eligible for the scheme. To be eligible to participate on the RSS, an individual must satisfy the qualifying criteria for the scheme. This includes having an entitlement to one of the qualifying social welfare payments and maintaining an underlying entitlement to Farm/Fish Assist.

Tús provides part-time temporary work in the communities, as a stepping stone back to employment for people on a long term jobseeker's payment. Tús participants work for an average of 19½ hours a week and placements last for maximum of 12 months. The twelve month duration of the Tús contract is set to reflect a number of inter-related elements. These include the need to ensure the benefit of participation on a work scheme is available to the widest possible number of jobseekers. After three years, a person can become eligible for a further 12 month placement on Tús.

JobPath providers arrange for the delivery of a broad range of education and training courses with a particular strong focus on upskilling the long term unemployed. In order to support JobPath providers to refer people to training and education, the Department will extend the initial 12 month JobPath referral period by the duration of any externally delivered approved training course. This can be up to an additional 26 weeks. The JobPath companies remain in contact with the clients while they are on such courses.

Participants on JobPath receive intensive individual support over a period of up to 12 months to help them tackle barriers to employment and to find jobs. If they are successful in securing employment the JobPath provider will continue to work with the client providing in-work support for a further period of up to 12 months.

A person who has completed a year with the JobPath service; continues to meet the criteria for long term unemployment and is not engaged in other activation supports and services becomes eligible for selection for a second period of activation with the JobPath service after a period of 4 to 6 months.

Carer's Allowance Applications

613. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protec-

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tion the position in relation to a review of an application for a carer's allowance by a person (details supplied) in view of the fact that same was submitted some time ago; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14225/18]

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 and 16 February 2018. However, specific bank statements pertaining to the business account of the person concerned for the period from October 2016 to the closure of this account 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.

Environmental Impact Assessments

614. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to prevent a company (details supplied), whose appeal against An Bord Pleanála's ruling that this company must now carry out environmental impact assessments, EIAs, in order to secure planning permission for extracting and milling peat was rejected by the High Court last month, from the ongoing and illegal extraction of lorry loads of peat from the bog in Clonsura, County Westmeath. [14188/18]

615. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that An Bord Pleanála ruled in 2013 that the peat extraction at a location (details supplied) is unauthorised and that the High Court recently confirmed that finding in a case taken by the peat extraction company against An Bord Pleanála; and the steps his Department will now take under the development control frameworks to ensure that the unauthorised peat extraction, which has caused and continues to cause the loss of

archaeological heritage, is ceased. [14345/18]

631. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the European Union (Licensing of Large-scale Extraction of Peat) Regulations 2016 will be signed into law; the status of interactions to date between his Department, the Environmental Protection Agency, EPA and the Office of the Attorney General in relation to these regulations; the outstanding issues which are delaying matters; if stakeholders have been briefed on delays on enacting these regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13884/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 614, 615 and 631 together.

My Department is continuing to actively progress draft European Union (Licensing of Large-Scale Extraction of Peat) Regulations that, when signed into law, will establish a revised regulatory regime in respect of large-scale peat extraction, requiring the Environmental Protection Agency to carry out an environmental impact assessment as part of its examination of applications for licences for peat extraction on sites of 30 hectares or more, and exempting such activity from the requirement to obtain planning permission.

The draft Regulations have been the subject of focused stakeholder input from relevant Government Departments and State bodies, industry representatives and environmental groups and are currently under review, following further consultations with the Environmental Protection Agency, with a view to finalising the Regulations for signature as speedily as possible.

It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the continuing High Court proceedings referred to in the Questions because neither I, as Minister, nor the State is a party to the case concerned. In this regard, it should be noted that section 30 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 specifically precludes me from exercising any power or control in relation to any case (including a planning enforcement case), with which a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála is or may be concerned.

Flood Relief Schemes

616. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the compensation paid to businesses affected by the flooding of 28 June 2012 in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13567/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): My Department has no role or function in the operation of any scheme of assistance for businesses affected by flooding and did not provide any compensation to businesses affected by flooding of 28 June 2012 in Cork County.

Following on from severe flooding events in 2015/16, the Government established a humanitarian scheme that would support small businesses, community, voluntary and sporting bodies who, through no fault of their own, could not obtain flood insurance, but subsequently experienced flood damage to their premises. The scheme was funded by the Department of Defence and administered by the Irish Red Cross. The scheme has been reactivated on a number of occasions since then, to provide support to businesses impacted by flooding in August 2017 in County Donegal, flooding in Laois in November 2017, and flooding arising from Storm Eleanor between 1 January and 5 January 2018.

Foreshore Licence Applications

617. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of a foreshore licensing application by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13570/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): My Department is currently in contact with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in an effort to provide a viable final resolution to the complex issues relating to this matter, and will continue to work to conclude the matter as quickly as possible.

Foreshore Licence Applications

618. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the foreshore lease renewal by a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13589/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The development in question was the subject of a 10 year lease granted to a third party in 1993 and which is expired since 31 October 2003. My Department will undertake a full inspection and report on the development in the coming weeks, following which contact will be made with the individual concerned with respect to his request to occupy and operate the originally leased area.

Housing Loans

619. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the variances there are in the Rebuilding Ireland assessment tool via the calculator tool on a website (details supplied) and the actual response form the local authority in response to a paper based application following an application; the way in which the variances can be up to 20% of the loan amount; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13606/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Following a review of the two existing local authority home loan schemes, the House Purchase Loan and the Home Choice Loan, a new loan offering, known as the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, was introduced on 1 February 2018.

As with the previous local authority home loan offerings, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is a local authority product and loan applications are made directly to the local authority in whose area the property proposed for purchase is situated.

The Home Loan calculator on www.rebuildingirelandhomeloan.ie gives an indication of how much you can borrow over the maximum term allowable and what the estimated repayments would be. A shorter term will reduce the amount you can borrow. All indicative repayment amounts are exclusive of Mortgage Protection Insurance (MPI) which is a requirement of borrowing. Please note that this calculator gives indicative results for illustrative and guidance purposes only and is not an offer of a loan.

The final decision on loan approval is a matter for each local authority and its Credit Committee on a case-by-case basis. Decisions on all housing loan applications must be made in accordance with the statutory credit policy that underpins the scheme, in order to ensure consistency of treatment for all applicants. Loan applicants who are dissatisfied with a loan ap-

plication decision of a local authority Credit Committee may appeal that decision to the local authority. Details of the appeals process can be obtained from the relevant local authority.

Building Regulations

620. **Deputy Michael Harty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans for a redress scheme for purchasers of houses and apartments that were not properly constructed and that are non-compliant with building and fire regulations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13688/18]

633. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of his plans to introduce measures to assist in financing management companies of pre-2014 multi-unit residential buildings that are found not to be in compliance with fire safety standards to undertake remedial building works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13889/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I propose to take Questions Nos. 620 and 633 together.

In general, building defects are matters for resolution between the contracting parties involved, the homeowner, the builder, the developer and/or their respective insurers, structural guarantee or warranty scheme. It is important to note that while my Department has overall responsibility for establishing and maintaining an effective regulatory framework for building standards and building control, it has no general statutory role in resolving defects in privately owned buildings, including dwellings, nor does it have a budget for such matters. In this regard, it is incumbent on the parties responsible for poor workmanship and/or the supply of defective materials to face up to their responsibilities and take appropriate action to provide remedies for the affected homeowners.

Under the Building Control Acts 1990 to 2014, primary responsibility for compliance of works with the requirements of the Building Regulations, including Part B (Fire Safety), rests with the owners, designers and builders of buildings. Enforcement of the Building Regulations is a matter for the 31 local building control authorities, who have extensive powers of inspection and enforcement under the Acts and who are independent in the use of their statutory powers.

In August 2017, I published a Framework for Enhancing Fire Safety in Dwellings, which is intended to be used as a guide by the owners and occupants of dwellings where fire safety deficiencies have been identified, or are a cause for concern. The Framework will also be of assistance to professional advisors both in developing strategies to improve fire safety and in developing strategies to enable continued occupation in advance of undertaking the necessary works to ensure compliance with the relevant Building Regulations.

It should be noted that in response to the many building failures that emerged in the last decade, my Department has been working on a building control reform agenda, including the following:

- the introduction of the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014, which require greater accountability in relation to compliance with Building Regulations in the form of statutory certification;

- working closely with the Local Government Management Agency on the oversight and governance of the local authority Building Control System to improve its effectiveness; and

- progressing primary legislation, the Building Control (Construction Industry Register Ireland) Bill 2017, to develop and promote a culture of competence, good practice and compliance with the building regulations in the construction sector.

Housing Provision

621. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number and name of local authorities that have applied to his Department for permission to enter into contacts to directly construct houses; the number of houses involved; the number of local authorities and voluntary housing agencies that are seeking approval for house construction projects; the timeframe for making such decisions; if his Department has made a decision on the issue of cost rental; the number of applications submitted to his Department from Kilkenny County Council for house construction projects; if a housing project at a location (details supplied) will be approved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13734/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Government's Rebuilding Ireland action plan is focused on accelerating the delivery of housing, with an investment of more than €6 billion to deliver 50,000 social housing units through build, refurbishment, acquisitions and leasing, over the period to 2021. The implementation of Rebuilding Ireland is well underway and making significant progress. This was evident in the Social Housing Output indicative figures published in January, showing nearly 26,000 households had their social housing need met in 2017. A breakdown of these numbers across all local authority areas, including Kilkenny County Council, will be made available following completion of the necessary validation process.

There are currently over 12,000 new social homes included in the Status Report on Social Housing Construction Projects, which is now published on a quarterly basis and includes projects that are recently completed, on site, or undergoing planning and design. This list is being added to on an on-going basis and the most recent version, covering the period to end Quarter 3 of 2017, is available at the following link: <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/quarter-3-social-housing-construction-status-report/>.

The Status Report includes construction projects of various scale being advanced by all local authorities, including Kilkenny County Council, in conjunction with Approved Housing Bodies and these will be advanced as quickly as possible, as will further new projects brought forward by the local authorities. My Department currently has no proposal for the site at Margaretsfield, Kilkenny, but a new targeted timeline for social housing construction projects has been put in place that sets out the optimum timeframe from initial project concept through to design, planning, procurement and mobilisation of contractor on site. The programme puts an onus on all stakeholders to advance projects through the process in a timely manner.

Against the background of the affordability pressures which exist in the rental market, particularly in our cities and other major urban areas, the Government is determined to make cost rental a major part of the Irish housing system. To do this, we will offer more affordable long-term rental options, by leveraging the value of State land to reduce the cost of provision. Cost rental is new to Ireland and a number of pilot cost rental projects are currently being progressed in Dublin, for example, at Enniskerry Road and in Lusk. The projects are being delivered by Approved Housing Bodies, working with relevant local authorities, the Housing Agency and my Department. The pilot projects are providing very valuable learning in terms of the design and delivery of such a new rental model in Ireland. Working with these and other key stakeholders, my Department is considering the optimal operation of the scheme, including eligibility criteria, taking account of broader policy considerations on affordable housing.

I am confident that the actions, targets and resources available under Rebuilding Ireland provide a strong platform for meeting our challenges in the housing sector and I am satisfied that delivery of the Plan remains firmly on track.

Tenant Purchase Scheme Review

622. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he plans to publish the review of the local authority tenant purchase scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13739/18]

623. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if local authority tenants in receipt of social welfare payment and who may have savings will be allowed the opportunity to purchase their home under the local authority tenant purchase scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13740/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 622 and 623 together.

The Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme came into operation on 1 January 2016. The Scheme is open to eligible tenants, including joint tenants, of local authority houses that are available for sale under the Scheme. To be eligible, tenants must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum reckonable income of €15,000 per annum and having been in receipt of social housing support for at least one year.

The minimum reckonable income for eligibility under the scheme is determined by the relevant local authority in accordance with the detailed provisions of the Ministerial Direction issued under Sections 24(3) and (4) of the 2014 Act. In the determination of the minimum reckonable income, local authorities include income from a number of different sources and classes, such as from employment, private pensions, maintenance payments and certain social welfare payments, including pensions, where the social welfare payment is secondary to employment income.

In determining reckonable income, the income of all tenants of the house, including adult children that are joint tenants, is included, as is the income of the spouse, civil partner or other partner / co-habitant of a tenant who lives in the house with them, thus ensuring the appropriate level of discount is applied to the purchase price.

The minimum income criterion was introduced in order to ensure the sustainability of the scheme. Applicants must demonstrate that they have an income that is long-term and sustainable in nature. This ensures that the tenant purchasing the house is in a financial position, as the owner, to maintain and insure the property for the duration of the charged period, in compliance with the conditions of the order transferring the ownership of, and responsibility for, the house from the local authority to the tenant.

The financing of any house sold under the Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme is a separate matter from the eligibility criteria for the scheme. If the tenant is deemed eligible under the scheme, he or she may fund the purchase of a house from one, or a combination, of his / her own resources or a mortgage provided by a financial institution or a local authority house purchase loan.

In line with the commitment given in Rebuilding Ireland, a review of the first 12 months of the Tenant Purchase Scheme's operation has been undertaken. The review has incorporated analysis of comprehensive data received from local authorities regarding the operation of the

scheme during 2016 and a wide-ranging public consultation process which took place in 2017 and saw submissions received from individuals, elected representatives and organisations. The review is now complete and a full report has been prepared setting out findings and recommendations. In finalising the report due consideration had to be given to possible arrangements for the implementation of the review recommendations. This is now almost complete and I expect to be in a position to publish the outcome of the review shortly.

Housing Grant Payments

624. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the various works for which eligible persons are entitled to receive grant aid from their local authority under the housing aid for older people scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13800/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Housing Aid for Older People Scheme provides grants of up to €8,000 to assist older people living in poor housing conditions to have necessary repairs or improvements carried out. Grant eligible works include structural repairs or improvements, re-wiring, drylining, repairs to/replacement of some/all windows and doors, provision of central heating, water and sanitary services, contract-cleaning, painting, radon remediation and any other repair or improvement works which are considered reasonably necessary to make the property habitable for the person.

Housing Assistance Payment

625. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the practice of topping up among tenants availing of the housing assistance payment where tenants pay money to the landlord in addition to the rent level agreed between the landlord and the local authority; the prevalence of this practice and the scale of payments that households across the country are topping up to secure properties under the HAP and homeless HAP schemes; his views on the extent of this practice and its impact on low income households; if this practice such as the similar practice that occurred in topping up of rent supplement payments is a breach of the provisions of the scheme and therefore illegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13822/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), a tenant sources their own accommodation. The tenancy agreement is between the tenant and the landlord and is covered by the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as amended). The accommodation sourced by tenants should be within the prescribed maximum HAP rent limits, which are based on the household size and the rental market within that area.

HAP applicants are informed of the maximum rent limits for their local authority area; these elements of the scheme are stated in the HAP Tenant Information Booklet and on the dedicated HAP website, www.hap.ie, and local authority staff also explain them to each HAP applicant.

Each local authority has statutory discretion to agree to a HAP payment up to 20% above the prescribed maximum rent limit in circumstances where it is necessary, because of local rental market conditions, to secure appropriate accommodation for a household that requires it. Greater enhanced support is also statutorily provided for in the Dublin Region for homeless households. It is a matter for the local authority to determine if the application of the flexibility is warranted on a case by case basis. Local authorities must also be cognisant of the provisions

of the Residential Tenancies Act when approving increases in HAP payments and advise tenants accordingly.

My Department is aware that some HAP recipients are making payments directly to their landlords, beyond the amount of HAP being paid on their behalf. There is no legislative provision precluding HAP supported households contributing towards the monthly rent to their landlord and my Department does not routinely collect data in relation to households in receipt of HAP who are making additional payments to their landlord beyond that of their HAP payment. Local Authorities have a responsibility to ensure that tenancies are sustainable and are advised not to provide HAP support to tenancies where the household would not be in a position to meet the rental costs being sought.

The data available to my Department indicates that the current rent limits and the flexibility to exceed those rent limits provide local authorities with sufficient capacity to assist households in securing rented accommodation that meets their needs.

My Department continues to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review. I am satisfied with how the HAP scheme is operating and I consider it to be a key vehicle for meeting housing need and fulfilling the ambitious programme under Rebuilding Ireland.

Fire Safety Regulations

626. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps that have been taken to examine buildings with cladding in the Dublin metropolitan area; the way in which such an examination was undertaken; and if it was on a drive by basis or if it involved a detailed examination of the sub-cladding material. [13858/18]

627. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the precise role of the chief fire officer with regard to house building here. [13859/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 626 and 627 together.

In response to the Grenfell Tower fire tragedy and in recognition of fears expressed for fire safety, I tasked my Department's National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management with coordinating a high-level Task Force to lead a reappraisal of fire safety in Ireland. The Task Force was requested to oversee and report on a number of initial steps, and to urgently consider any potential life safety issues and appropriate responses.

In addition to establishing the Fire Safety Task Force, I requested that a number of immediate initial actions be taken including, directing fire authorities to carry out a preliminary survey to identify buildings of more than six storeys, or more than 18m in height, fitted with external cladding or rain screen systems, with or without insulation and to revert to my Department with this information. Fire authorities were advised that a site visit would be required, to confirm information, including whether cladding to the buildings is present.

Where buildings of more than six storeys, or more than 18m in height, with cladding or cladding systems present, were identified, fire authorities were advised to consider whether use of section 18(6)(a) of the Fire Services Acts, 1981 and 2003 – to require the person having control over the premises to carry out a fire safety assessment of the premises, including the cladding system and concealed spaces (cavities) in the external wall construction – was warranted.

This initial work in relation to medium to high rise buildings has been carried out and all

fire authorities, including the four Dublin fire authorities, have reported back to my Department as requested.

A number of medium to high rise buildings have been identified as having external cladding which gave rise to concerns and in these cases building owners have been required by fire authorities, using their powers under the Fire Services Acts, to undertake fire safety assessments in these specific buildings. The assessment process in individual buildings is ongoing.

With regard to the precise role of Chief Fire Officers, all arrangements in relation to staffing in each local authority are the responsibility of the relevant Chief Executive for that authority and queries relating to the roles of local authority staff should be referred to the relevant local authority. As Minister, I have no function in these matters.

Fire Safety

628. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the measures taken to ensure fire safety and fire safety compliance with regard to apartment complexes and new timber framed housing developments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13861/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Matters relating to fire safety and fire safety compliance are dealt with by my Department by way of legislation, Regulations and Guidance Documents.

In relation to the Building Regulations, work has been on-going in my Department to review Part B/Technical Guidance Document (TGD) B – Fire (2006). A new Part B/TGD B Volume 2 (2017) came into force on 1 July 2017, in relation to dwellings. Important revisions in the TGD B Volume 2 include enhanced provision for fire detection and alarm systems in dwelling houses, guidance on fire safety in community dwelling houses, guidance on timber frame construction, including new provisions in respect of timber frame party walls, enhanced provisions in respect of loft conversions, new provisions for galleries in dwelling houses and other general updates. The existing TGD B volume 1 provides guidance on other building types, including buildings containing flats or apartments. Work is currently underway on a revision to TGD B Volume 1.

With regard to timber framed construction, in accordance with the recommendations of the Timber Frame Housing Report, a standard in relation to timber frame construction was developed. Irish Standard 440: 2009/A1:2014 Timber Frame Construction, Dwellings and other Buildings (I.S. 440) specifies requirements for materials, design, manufacture, construction details, site work and quality control for platform timber frame construction. It requires that the responsibilities for the tasks involved in the planning, structural design, site erection and inspection be agreed and recorded prior to the commencement of each project. I.S. 440 also gives specific details relating to fire, including the construction of separating walls, horizontal and vertical fire stopping, cavity barriers and detailed fire stopping junctions for walls and floors and service penetrations.

I.S. 440 is currently under review and it is intended that both external and party wall new constructions and methods will be included in the next revision of the document. Manufacturers of timber frame buildings are assessed under an approval scheme operated by the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) for compliance with I.S. 440 requirements, including Factory Production Control (FPC), and a register of compliant manufacturers is available on the NSAI website at <https://www.nsai.ie/Our-Services/Certification/Company-Registration-Search.aspx>.

It should also be noted that my Department has recently issued guidance on Timber Frame Walls, which have been tested to the European fire test standard and meet the performance set down in Technical Guidance Document B (TGD B) for external and separating walls in dwellings. This has been transmitted to all registered users of the Building Control Management System and to all Building Control Authorities.

Under section 18(2) of the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003, responsibility for ongoing fire safety in buildings of all kinds (other than dwellings) is placed on the ‘person having control’ of each building. In the case of a building containing flats or apartments, this may, for example, be an Owners Management Company.

Local fire authorities have powers of inspection, and where necessary enforcement, under the Building Control Act 1990 and the Fire Services Acts 1981 and 2003.

Typically, in carrying out inspections under the Fire Services Acts, some or all of the following aspects will be reviewed –

- The passive or inbuilt fire safety features in a building, such as the layout and escape routes from the building and the construction of the building; the required passive fire safety features relating to the use of the building and the scale and occupancy;

- The active fire safety features, such as fire detection and alarm systems, which alert persons on the premises to the danger of fire and enable them to use the means of escape;

- The management of the building, including management of fire safety, to prevent fires occurring in the first place and to manage building services and fire safety to ensure that safety is not compromised.

Guidance on these features is generally set out in relevant guidance documents and codes of practice rather than in specific legislation or regulation. My Department has published guidance documents and codes of practice for a range of building types.

A fire authority may require a ‘person having control’ over a building, or an owner or occupier of such a building, to carry out a fire safety assessment of such building and to notify the fire authority of such assessment. In such instances, the ‘person having control’ over a building may engage professional advisors to carry out these inspections and to assist with discharging their statutory duties; however, ultimate responsibility for fire safety in the building remains with the ‘person having control’.

In August 2017, my Department published a Framework for Enhancing Fire Safety in Dwellings, where concerns arise. The Framework is intended to be used as a guide by the owners and occupants of dwellings where fire safety deficiencies have been identified, or are a cause for concern. The Framework will also be of assistance to professional advisors, both in developing strategies to improve fire safety and in developing strategies to enable continued occupation in advance of undertaking the necessary works to ensure compliance with the relevant Building Regulations.

Any member of the public who is concerned about fire safety in a building should contact the person having control of the building in the first instance, and their local Fire Service if the concerns remain unresolved.

Planning Guidelines

629. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when he will commence section 28(1) of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016; the reason for the delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13868/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 28(1) of the Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016, which amends section 42 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, relating to the extension of the duration of planning permission, has not been commenced to date because I have tabled an amendment for consideration at Seanad Committee Stage of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016.

The amendment that I have proposed would permit the extension of the duration of a planning permission only where substantial works are carried out during the initial duration of the planning permission and allow for a maximum of two extensions of the duration of a permission, the combined duration of which would not exceed 5 years. This proposed amendment is part of a package of measures which are aimed at assisting in combatting land hoarding.

I intend to bring section 28(1), as amended, of the 2016 Act into operation as soon as the 2016 Bill is enacted.

Building Regulations Compliance

630. **Deputy John Lahart** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the steps he has taken to ensure that the developers of defective apartment complexes built during the boom are prevented from constructing homes in the future; the penalties that have been levied on these developers; the new regulations and laws that have been introduced to safeguard home buyers from purchasing homes in such complexes that will suffer from the same building flaws in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13872/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): In general, building defects are matters for resolution between the contracting parties involved, the homeowner, the builder, the developer and/or their respective insurers, structural guarantee or warranty scheme. It is important to note that while my Department has overall responsibility for establishing and maintaining an effective regulatory framework for building standards and building control, it has no general statutory role in resolving defects in privately owned buildings, including dwellings, nor does it have a budget for such matters.

In this regard, it is incumbent on the parties responsible for poor workmanship and/or the supply of defective materials to face up to their responsibilities and take appropriate action to provide remedies for the affected homeowners.

Under the Building Control Acts 1990 to 2014, primary responsibility for compliance of works with the requirements of the Building Regulations rests with the owners, designers and builders of buildings. Enforcement of the Building Regulations is a matter for the 31 local building control authorities, who have extensive powers of inspection and enforcement under the Acts and who are independent in the use of their statutory powers.

Stronger compliance with building standards and the broader building control reform agenda are key priorities for Government. In particular, the Government has committed to placing the Construction Industry Register Ireland (CIRI), which was established on a voluntary basis in 2014, on a statutory footing.

At the end of May 2017, the Government approved the draft heads of a Bill for this purpose, which was referred to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government for pre-legislative scrutiny. I received the Committee's report on 14 December 2017 and I am considering its recommendations, with a view to progressing the drafting as soon as possible.

The main objective of the Building Control (Construction Industry Register Ireland) Bill is to develop and promote a culture of competence, good practice and compliance with the Building Regulations within the Builder community of the construction sector. The establishment of a robust, mandatory, statutory register of builders and specialist contractors is an essential consumer protection measure giving those who engage a registered builder the assurance that they are dealing with a competent and compliant operator.

The General Scheme of the CIRI Bill requires that a builder demonstrate competence in the category of building works to which the registration relates. Competence is likely to be based on a number of factors including past experience. While no legislation can have retrospective effect and any breach of another statute must be prosecuted under the appropriate act, the Bill ensures that applicants declare any convictions under health & safety and/or building control legislation in any jurisdiction.

The Bill will also allow for complaints against registered builders to be made on a number of grounds and provides for a range of proportionate sanctions to be imposed after investigation.

Sanctions may be imposed in respect of any breach of the requirements of registration including, where a registered member of CIRI failed, in connection with the carrying out of building work for which they are registered, to meet the standards of competence required for such registration.

This legislation will underpin the reforms which have been made through the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations and contribute to the development of a culture of competence and compliance in the construction sector.

Question No. 631 answered with Question No. 614.

Rental Sector Strategy

632. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the timeframe for the affordable rental scheme pilot project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13888/18]

649. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the amount of funding allocated for a pilot project affordable rent scheme in Dun Laoghaire Rathdown; the amount that has been spent on compensating the local authority for costs incurred; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14138/18]

650. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the proposed eligibility and selection criteria for a pilot project affordable rent scheme in Dun Laoghaire Rathdown; the anticipated number of residents; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14139/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 632, 649 and 650 together.

Against the background of the affordability pressures which exist in the rental market, particularly in our cities and other major urban areas, the Government is determined to make cost rental a major part of the Irish housing system. To do this, we will offer more affordable long-term rental options, by leveraging the value of State land to reduce the cost of provision.

Cost rental is new to Ireland and a number of pilot cost rental projects are currently being progressed in Dublin, for example, at Enniskerry Road and in Lusk. The projects are being delivered by Approved Housing Bodies, working with relevant local authorities, the Housing Agency and my Department.

The pilot projects are providing very valuable learning in terms of the design and delivery of such a new rental model in Ireland. Working with these and other key stakeholders, my Department is considering the optimal operation of the scheme, including eligibility criteria, taking account of broader policy considerations on affordable housing.

In parallel with the advancement of the aforementioned pilot projects, discussions are ongoing with the European Investment Bank to leverage its extensive experience and knowledge, in developing and supporting cost rental and other affordable housing models, with a view to developing further cost rental projects in Ireland, at a greater scale.

I expect local authorities to be pro-active in developing and bringing forward innovative concepts regarding the use of their land for the delivery of both affordable homes for purchase and rent. Arising from the second Housing Summit with local authority Chief Executives in January, I have asked each local authority to furnish a report to me, setting out their plans for delivery of both social and affordable housing, with a particular focus on affordable home provision in the main urban centres, where the greatest challenges exist. These reports have recently been received and are under consideration by my Department.

Question No. 633 answered with Question No. 620.

Fire Safety

634. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of times the high level taskforce to reappraise Ireland's response to fire safety standards announced in June 2017 met; the attendees at the meetings; the actions that have arisen; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13890/18]

635. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of local authorities' response and actions arising from the review of multi-storey units in the social housing sector requested by him in June 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13891/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 634 and 635 together.

On 27 June 2017, in response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy and in recognition of fears expressed in the context of fire safety, I tasked my Department's National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management with coordinating a high-level Task Force to lead a reappraisal of fire safety in Ireland. The Task Force was requested to oversee and report on a number of initial steps, and to urgently consider any potential life safety issues and appropriate responses. The work of the Task Force involves reviewing and reappraising existing arrangements and systems for fire safety and related issues which impact on fire safety in Ireland. As it carries out its work, the Task Force is considering information and developments arising from inquiries and

reviews in the UK in relation to the Grenfell Tower fire.

The Task Force held its first meeting on 12 July 2017 and has met on 10 occasions in total. Its membership consists of the National Director for Fire and Emergency Management along with a number of senior officials from the National Directorate, the Building Standards Section and the Housing and Corporate Management Divisions of my Department, as well as representatives of the Office of Public Works, the Local Government Management Agency, two Chief Fire Officers, external fire safety consultants and a SIPTU representative.

In addition to establishing the Task Force, I requested that a number of immediate initial actions be taken. Local authorities were directed to undertake a review of fire safety in multi-storey social housing buildings and to also review fire safety in medium to high rise buildings in their functional areas. The Task Force was mandated to oversee and report on these initial actions as well as reviewing existing arrangements and systems for fire safety and related issues which impact on fire safety in Ireland.

This initial work in relation to both multi-storey social housing buildings and medium to high rise buildings has been carried out and all local authorities have reported back to my Department as requested. The Fire Safety Task Force established two sub-groups to review the returns received from local authorities. The returns indicate that multi-storey social housing buildings in Ireland are generally designed, built and equipped appropriately for domestic fire risk, although a number of fire safety issues were identified and followed up.

With regard to the review of medium to high rise buildings (greater than 6 stories or 18m high), more than 800 buildings were identified through the national survey undertaken. A number of these were identified as having external cladding which gave rise to concerns and in these cases building owners have been required by local authorities, using their powers under the Fire Services Acts, to undertake fire safety assessments in these specific buildings. National guidance on further actions in light of the results of these fire safety assessments, taking account of emerging information on the cladding issue from international sources, was prepared by the Task Force sub-group and a guidance note – “*Fire safety Guidance Note 01 of 2017 Assessing Existing Cladding Systems in Buildings of More than Six Storeys, or More than 18m in Height*” – was published by my Department in December 2017. The guidance note was circulated to fire authorities and placed on my Department’s website as a support for those undertaking assessments of cladding in medium to high rise building. The assessment process in individual buildings, and remediation work where deemed necessary in a small number of buildings, is ongoing and in some cases is expected to take a number of months to complete.

The preparation of the report of the Task Force has been impacted by a number of recent severe weather events, including ex-Hurricane Ophelia and the blizzard conditions and heavy snow arising from Storm Emma, which required temporary re-prioritising of the National Directorate’s resources. However, the work of the Task Force has now advanced significantly and I expect to be provided with the report by the end of April 2018, which I will consider without delay.

Home Loan Scheme

636. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the eligibility criteria for the Rebuilding Ireland home loan in relation to employment status in view of the fact that the website refers to continuous employment (details supplied); if the scheme is intended to include the workers that have continuous employment but not defined as permanent; if they will be eligible for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[13897/18]

642. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when a reply will issue to correspondence (details supplied). [14002/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 636 and 642 together.

Following a review of the two existing local authority home loan schemes, the House Purchase Loan and the Home Choice Loan, a new loan offering, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan, was made available on 1 February 2018. The new loan will enable credit-worthy first-time buyers to access sustainable mortgage lending to purchase new or second-hand properties in a suitable price range. The low rate of fixed interest associated with the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan provides first time buyers with access to mortgage finance that they may not otherwise have been able to afford at a higher interest rate.

The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is targeted at first-time buyers who wish to own their own home, have access to an adequate deposit and have the capacity to repay a mortgage, but who are unable to access a mortgage sufficient for them to purchase their first home. As with the previous local authority loan offerings, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is available to first-time buyers only. This is to ensure the effective targeting of limited resources.

In order to be eligible for the scheme, single applicants must not be earning greater than €50,000 per annum and the combined income of joint applicants must not be greater than €75,000 per annum.

The primary earner on the application must have at least two years' continuous employment (this can be self-employment) and the second applicant must have continuous employment for at least one year. I have asked my Department to liaise with the Housing Finance Agency to ensure that there is consistent information in relation to eligibility for the loan.

Full details of the loan's eligibility criteria and other information is available from the dedicated Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan website <http://rebuildingirelandhomeloan.ie/>.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

637. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Dublin City Council will be selling off a number of pieces of land to fund the new northside and southside depot; and if the site value of the land will be provided to the Council in order that this land can be maintained for social and affordable housing. [13899/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): In the first instance, the optimal usage, management and development of Dublin City Council's land bank is a matter for the Council itself. In relation to the specific land referenced, I understand that the Council is working on a Depot Consolidation Project, involving the rationalisation of existing depots, into two main locations, to achieve operational efficiencies and to release lands for more appropriate uses.

My Department is working in partnership with the Council to ensure the optimal delivery of new social and affordable homes from its residential land bank. To this end, and as part of the new approach to active State land management under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, details of the Council's residential land bank were published

on the Rebuilding Ireland Housing Land Map, available at <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/rebuilding-ireland-land-map/>.

Information on the Council's social housing developments, as at end Q3 2017, is available in the Construction Status Report which is available at <http://rebuildingireland.ie/news/quarter-3-social-housing-construction-status-report/>. I expect to publish an updated report shortly, reflecting the position at end 2017.

My Department is also working closely with Dublin City Council on sites to help develop large mixed-tenure sites, for example, at O'Devaney Gardens and Oscar Traynor Road. In total, these two sites can accommodate the delivery of over 1,200 newly constructed homes.

Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility

638. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to raise the threshold for social housing supports in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13966/18]

640. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to remove the working family payment from the means assessed for social housing supports; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13968/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): I propose to take Questions Nos. 638 and 640 together.

The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy.

The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band were based on an assessment of the income needed to provide for a household's basic needs, plus a comparative analysis of the local rental cost of housing accommodation across the country. The limits also reflect a blanket increase of €5,000 introduced prior to the new system coming into operation, in order to broaden the base from which social housing tenants are drawn and thereby promote sustainable communities.

Under the Household Means Policy, which applies in all local authorities, net income for social housing assessment is defined as gross household income less income tax, PRSI and the universal social charge. Most payments received from the Department of Social Protection are assessable, including Family Income Supplement. The policy provides for a range of income that can be disregarded in terms of housing assessment and local authorities have discretion to decide to disregard income that is temporary, short-term or once off in nature.

As part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of income eligibility for social housing supports has commenced and I expect the results of this review to be available for publication later this year.

Home Loan Scheme

639. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to address the problems facing persons renting and or sourcing loans post bankruptcy. [13967/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):

The only home loan scheme available from the local authorities is the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan which was launched in February this year, replacing the previous local authority home loan schemes. The new loan will enable credit-worthy first-time buyers to access sustainable mortgage lending to purchase new or second-hand properties in a suitable price range. The scheme is targeted at those unable to access a mortgage sufficient for them to purchase their first home. As with the previous local authority loan offerings, the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is available to first-time buyers only. There are terms and conditions which apply to the scheme, including income limits and limits on the value of the dwelling being purchased. Any person who meets the criteria and wishes to apply for a loan under the Scheme should apply to their local authority.

However, in relation to the Deputy's specific query, it should be noted that, under the credit policy issued in accordance with the Housing (Rebuilding Ireland Home Loans) Regulations 2018, there is a range of categories of people to whom the loan scheme is not available. These include people who are declared bankrupt or currently subject to bankruptcy proceedings who have been involved in a previous settlement which has resulted in a loss to a financial institution.

Where a person does not qualify for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme, they are entitled to apply to their local authority for assessment as to whether they qualify for, and are in need of, social housing support. In such instances, they should apply to the local authority for their area for an assessment.

I have also announced a package of measures in relation to developing an affordable purchase scheme and a cost rental scheme, the details of which I intend to finalise shortly.

Question No. 640 answered with Question No. 638.

Fire Stations Provision

641. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when funding which was announced three years ago to provide extra space in Mountrath fire station will be released; when approval will be given to Laois County Council for work to proceed at this facility; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [13996/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): The provision of a fire service in its functional area, including the establishment and maintenance of a fire brigade, the assessment of fire cover needs, and the provision of fire station premises, is a statutory function of individual fire authorities under the Fire Service Act, 1981. My Department supports the fire authorities through setting general policy, providing a central training programme, issuing guidance on operational and other related matters and providing capital funding for priority infrastructural projects.

In February 2016, my Department announced a five-year Fire Services Capital Programme with an allocation of €40 million, based on an annual €8 million allocation, to be used for the purchase of fire appliances and specialist equipment, building or upgrading of prioritised Fire Stations, an upgrade of the Communications and Mobilisation system and improvements to Training Centres. Upgrade/refurbishment works to Mountrath Fire Station were included as part of this 2016-2020 Capital Programme.

In February 2018, Laois County Council was approved to seek tenders for a fire station upgrade at Mountrath, subject to a maximum Departmental contribution of €130,000. When a

firm tender proposal has been submitted, my Department will continue working with the Council to progress this project. The projects in the capital programme are reassessed on an annual basis and priority may be adjusted to bring forward projects offering best value-for-money and to take account of the state of readiness of projects generally.

Question No. 642 answered with Question No. 636.

Protected Disclosures

643. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 1767 of 16 January 2018, if he will make available an unredacted copy of the report submitted by Galway City Council relative to the case of a person (details supplied); if the protected disclosure submitted by the person is being examined by an independent person outside of and unconnected to his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14054/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): My Department's assessment of both the submission made with reference to the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 by the individual named and Galway City Council's report in response to that submission is now at an advanced stage.

As part of its assessment, my Department wrote to Galway City Council on 22 February, 2018 seeking clarification of points of information arising from the Council's report. The Council has indicated that it is compiling the information requested and will respond as soon as possible.

My Department will then be in a position to finalise its assessment and will be in contact with the individual concerned at that stage.

Rent Pressure Zones

644. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if an area will be designated as a rent zone (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14112/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 24A of the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2016 provides that the Housing Agency, in consultation with housing authorities, may make a proposal to the Minister that an area should be considered as a Rent Pressure Zone. Following receipt of such a proposal, the Minister requests the Director of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) to conduct an assessment of the area to establish whether or not it meets the criteria for designation and to report to the Minister on whether the area should be designated as a Rent Pressure Zone. For the purpose of the Act, 'area' is defined as either the administrative area of a housing authority or a local electoral area within the meaning of section 2 of the Local Government Act 2001. There is no provision for any other type of area to be designated as a Rent Pressure Zone.

For an area to be designated a Rent Pressure Zone, it must satisfy the following criteria set out in section 24A(4) of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 (as inserted by section 36 of the 2016 Act): (i) The annual rate of rent inflation in the area must have been 7% or more in four of the last six quarters; and (ii) The average rent for tenancies registered in the area with the RTB in the last quarter must be above the average national rent (the National Standardised Rent in

the RTB's Rent Index Report) in the last quarter (€1,054 per month in Q4 2017).

On 21 March 2018, the RTB published its Rent Index Report in relation to Quarter 4 2017, which includes a summary of the data used as the criteria for designating Rent Pressure Zones in relation to all Local Electoral Areas in the country. This allows all interested parties to see exactly where their area stands in relation to average rent levels and increases and possible designation. The data from the Rent Index Report relating to Limerick City East are detailed in the following table:

Local Electoral Area	Quarters 7%	Average 2017 Q4 (€)
Limerick City East	3	€1,039.82

In Limerick City East, the average monthly is below the national standardised rent of €1,054 per month and in 3 of the last 6 quarters rent inflation has been 7% or greater. Therefore, of the Local Electoral Area of Limerick City East does not meet the criteria for designation at this time.

The Housing Agency will continue to monitor the rental market and may recommend further areas for designation. Where, following the procedures set out in the Act, it is found at a future date that additional areas meet the criteria, they will be designated as Rent Pressure Zones.

Social and Affordable Housing Provision

645. **Deputy Eoin Ó Broin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the basis on which the target of 500 Part V units was set for 2018; and the details of the targets by each local authority area. [14117/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Over the course of Rebuilding Ireland, it is estimated that some 4,700 social housing homes will be delivered through new build Part V units.

In terms of the trajectory of delivery for Part V, my Department has set overall targets for such delivery based on the pipeline in place for Part V and also anticipated new build activity in the private market. Part V output is reported on the Department's website at the following link:

<http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/affordable-housing/affordable-housing-and-part-v-statistics>.

69 Part V units were delivered in 2016. Indicative output for 2017 shows that this increased substantially to over 380 units, and 590 units are profiled for delivery in 2018.

My Department is currently finalising targets with each Local Authority, including for Part V social housing homes delivery across the period 2017-2021, with a particular focus on 2018, details of which will be published once finalised.

Home Loan Scheme

646. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the reason carers who are in receipt of carers' allowance are not allowed to have their al-

lowance income included in the assessment for the Rebuilding Ireland loan (details supplied); and his plans to address the matter. [14120/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): The Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan is not, as a general rule, available to those in receipt of unemployment or other social welfare benefits. However, where there is a primary income of a waged or salaried nature, long-term State benefit payments may be considered. State benefit payments allowable are:

- State Pension (Contributory);
- State pension (Non-Contributory);
- Widow's/Widower's Pension;
- Blind Pension;
- Invalidity Pension;
- Disability Allowance.

The long-term nature of the payment must be confirmed by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. All applications are dealt with on a case-by-case basis and are referred to the relevant local authority's Credit Committee for a final decision.

Further information is available on the dedicated website, www.rebuildingirelandhomeloan.ie.

Approved Housing Bodies

647. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of his Department's steps to address the classification of approved housing bodies as part of general Government expenditure; the timeframe for actions in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14136/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Following the decision in December 2017 by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) to reclassify 14 of the 16 largest Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) examined as falling within the public sector, EUROSTAT confirmed its agreement with the decision earlier this month.

Notwithstanding the decision by the CSO, the Government still sees a central role for the voluntary housing sector in contributing to delivery of social housing under Rebuilding Ireland and intends to press ahead with the ambitious plans to use all mechanisms and schemes, including through the AHB sector, to ensure that we maintain our planned momentum towards meeting the 50,000 Rebuilding Ireland social housing target.

Further work is being undertaken to fully assess the implications of the reclassification decision, primarily through engagement between my Department, and the Departments of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, with technical support provided by the Housing Finance Agency and the Housing Agency.

The assessment will involve developing a more accurate understanding of the retrospective and prospective fiscal implications of the AHB reclassification, identifying further measures that can be taken in mitigation of the impact of the decision from a Government accounting

perspective, and ways to support the AHB sector to deliver on its Rebuilding Ireland targets.

Housing Provision

648. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of units covered by the enhanced leasing scheme, by county; the anticipated costs per annum in 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14137/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): A range of housing options are necessary to ensure a supply of accommodation to meet different types of social housing need. Harnessing the off-balance sheet potential of private investment in social housing is an important objective of the Government and the social housing targets set out in Rebuilding Ireland over the period to 2021 reflect the ambition in that regard.

Of the 50,000 social housing homes to be delivered under Rebuilding Ireland, 10,000 are targeted to be leased by local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) under leasing arrangements from a range of different sources, including 3,500 homes targeted using the Repair and Lease Scheme (RLS), and 6,500 homes using a combination of the existing social housing leasing arrangements, and the new Enhanced Lease Scheme. All homes delivered under leasing arrangements, including a new Enhanced Leasing Scheme, will be funded under the Department's Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP).

The new Scheme is targeted at new build or new to the market properties to be delivered at scale and will complement the existing long-term leasing arrangements, which will continue to be available. There are, however, a number of key differences between the existing long term lease and the enhanced lease, the purpose of which is to facilitate larger levels of private investment in social housing while ensuring that the capital investment is off balance sheet in respect of Government expenditure.

Under the existing long term lease agreement, the owner retains responsibility for the structural maintenance on the property. However, the day to day management and maintenance of the property, e.g. leaking pipes, broken heating etc., is carried out by the local authority or AHB. Under the enhanced lease arrangement, the owner is responsible for both structural maintenance and day to day repairs. This is one of the fundamental differences between the enhanced lease and the existing arrangement and is one of the features of the lease that determined the CSO and EUROSTAT classification of the enhanced lease as an "operating" rather than a "finance" lease, and therefore off-balance sheet.

The owner will be paid up to 95% of the market rate - as opposed to 80% (85% for apartments) under the existing lease agreements. This reflects the reduced responsibility of the local authority in relation to maintenance of the property under this type of contract as compared to standard long term leasing. The local authority will retain the differential rent paid by the tenant.

The market rent must be evidenced by a valuation prepared by a qualified valuer and each valuation must refer to 3 comparable properties in the locality as evidence of the market rent for the property. Rent reviews will be carried out every 3 years, linked to the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP). The term of the enhanced lease is 25 years, rather than the 10-20 year term under the existing agreements.

Local authorities will determine the suitability of the proposed properties, having regard to the standard of the properties, the requirement for social housing in the area and the criteria set out in each authority's Development Plans, including, in particular, sustainable communities

considerations.

The scheme will be governed by my Department and operated by local authorities. It will be funded through my Department's SHCEP. The Housing Agency will manage and administer the scheme on behalf of my Department and will act as a national co-ordinator.

A call for proposals is currently open and the Housing Agency is accepting submissions from interested parties until 12 April 2018. All proposals are subject to a range of criteria as set out in the "Calls for Proposals for Enhanced Long Term Social Housing Leasing Scheme" and the proposals will be assessed and marked in accordance with the terms set out therein. The Call for Proposals is available on the Housing Agency website at the following link: <https://www.housingagency.ie/News/Current-News/Enhanced-Long-Term-Social-Housing-Leasing-Scheme.aspx>.

Further information with respect to the numbers and locations of the units proposed for leasing under the Scheme will only be available once the individual proposals have been assessed, marked and accepted in accordance with the terms and methodology set out in the Calls for Proposals document.

Questions Nos. 649 and 650 answered with Question No. 632.

Development Contributions

651. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his Department's policy in relation to the imposition of development levies on approved housing bodies developments; if a circular has issued on the matter; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14140/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Development contributions applied by local authorities are levied on the basis of a development contribution scheme adopted by the elected members, which sets out how contributions are to be applied in respect of developments in their respective functional areas. The level of contribution and the types of development to which development contributions should apply, including any exemptions from charging in specific circumstances if that is deemed appropriate, are therefore determined at local authority level, in accordance with the powers vested in elected members in this regard.

My role as Minister is to provide the necessary statutory and policy framework within which individual development contribution schemes are adopted by each local authority. In this context, my Department issued statutory guidelines to planning authorities in January 2013 under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, on the implementation of development contribution schemes to which planning authorities are required to have regard in the performance of their planning functions.

This guidance updated and supplemented non-statutory guidance previously issued to local authorities by my Department by way of Circulars PD 4/2003 and PD 5/2007. Both of these Circulars recommended the waiving of development contributions by local authorities in respect of the provision of social housing generally - including the provision of social housing by voluntary and cooperative bodies approved under Section 6 of the Housing Act 1992. This has been the effective policy in this regard as advocated by my Department since 2003.

Referendum Data

652. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to set the date for a referendum on the Thirty-sixth Amendment of the Constitution; if the date will be set immediately following the Bill passing both Houses of the Oireachtas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14172/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): Section 10 the Referendum Act 1994 provides that whenever a Bill containing a proposal for the amendment of the Constitution is passed by both Houses of the Oireachtas, I am required to make an order appointing polling day. I will make the necessary polling day order if the Thirty-sixth Amendment of the Constitution Bill 2018 is passed by both Houses of the Oireachtas.

Register of Electors

653. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his plans to publicise the deadlines for the supplementary registers for the upcoming referendum on the Thirty-sixth Amendment of the Constitution; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14173/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan): My Department plans to advertise the opportunity for eligible voters to apply for inclusion in the supplement to the register of electors following the making of a Polling Day Order. This advertising will be carried out through the main national newspapers, the Department's website, the website of the Returning Officer and at *www.checktheregister.ie*.

The advertising will draw attention to the requirement that applications for entry in the supplement must be received by the relevant local authority at least 15 days (not including Sundays, Good Friday or Public Holidays) before polling day at a referendum in order to be considered for that referendum. The advertising will also draw attention to the requirement that applications for inclusion in the supplement to the postal or special voters lists must be received by the relevant local authority at least 22 days (not including Sundays, Good Friday or Public Holidays) before polling day at a referendum in order to be considered for that referendum.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

654. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when applications will be invited from local authorities for the second round tranche of LIHAF; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14185/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As part of Budget 2018, I announced that an additional €50 million Exchequer funding will be available for a second LIHAF call. As was the case in the original LIHAF call, this will be subject to matching funding by local authorities, where my Department will provide 75% Exchequer funding, with the Local Authorities themselves providing 25% matching funding, bringing the total available to €66.5 million.

The criteria for the second call are currently being finalised and I expect a further call for proposals under phase 2 of LIHAF in April/May 2018. It will be open to all local authorities to submit new projects or resubmit previous projects for consideration at that time. Following assessment and selection of successful projects, it is expected that these LIHAF 2 projects would commence towards the end of 2018, with funding drawdown available from 2019.

Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund

655. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of LIHAF funding and the associated below market value housing to be provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [14189/18]

Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy): As a key initiative of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, the Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund, LIHAF, is designed to fund the provision of public off-site infrastructure to relieve critical infrastructure blockages and enable housing developments to be built on key sites at scale. Funding of €200 million was originally provided under LIHAF, of which €150 million is funded by the Exchequer and local authorities fund €50 million. Further funding was made available as part of Budget 2018, bringing the total fund to €266 million and there will be a second call for proposals in order to allocate the additional funds.

The total cost of the 34 projects which received preliminary approval under LIHAF in March 2017 was €226 million. When approving proposals, it was considered prudent to approve in excess of €200 million available at the time to allow for instances where a proposal does not proceed due to planning issues or unforeseen delays or where potential savings are secured through tendering or other efficiencies.

As required under the scheme criteria and conditions, a key focus has been to ensure that there is a proportionate dividend for the State's investment in infrastructure, as demonstrated by either provision of housing at scale at certain prices, a proportionate reduction in house prices across all of the homes being facilitated or a specified number of homes which will benefit from a larger price reduction.

To date, I have given final approval for 30 of the 34 original projects under LIHAF, which will activate supply of almost 20,000 housing units on previously inactive sites, and grant agreements in respect of those projects have been signed. The cost of these projects is €195.7 million, of which €146.7 million will be funded by my Department and €49 million will be funded by local authorities. The remaining four projects are being moved for consideration under LIHAF 2 later in 2018. Summary information on the approved projects will be published shortly, including details of the scale of reduced-price homes being facilitated on these sites as part of the dividend for the funding.

Funding of €1.67 million was drawn down in respect of LIHAF projects in 2017, which was mainly in respect of design costs. It is expected that this will increase substantially in 2018 as projects move to the construction stage. Funding for LIHAF is ring-fenced within the overall housing budget and will be available for local authorities to drawdown over the lifetime of the projects involved. Through proactive management of the broader housing programme, the LIHAF underspend in 2017 was diverted to other housing activities, ensuring that the funding available in 2017 was fully applied to housing priorities.

EU Directives

656. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of hectares of land designated special areas of conservation in counties Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal and Roscommon; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13954/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): Ireland, like all other Member States, is required under the EU Habitats Directive to designate special

areas of conservation for the protection of endangered habitats and species as listed in the Directive. It has identified and protected 439 sites for designation or designated as special areas of conservation.

The information requested by the Deputy is set out in the following table:

COUNTY	Total Terrestrial Area (ha)	Terrestrial SAC Area (ha)
Donegal	484,559.33	84,982.74
Leitrim	158,871.88	17,833.85
Roscommon	253,753.32	13,599.66
Sligo	181,235.05	25,144.27

National Parks and Wildlife Service

657. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if an application for a licence to exercise leisure animals, horses and ponies in Ballykeeffe Woods, County Kilkenny will be granted to a person (details supplied); and if she will expedite same. [13730/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): The area in question is a Nature Reserve. My officials are not aware of any application for such a permission having been made for this area. However, it is unlikely that such an activity could be permitted given the nature of the site and also associated public health and safety considerations.

Creative Ireland Programme

658. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of foreign visits taken by Creative Ireland personnel and or staff within her Department for purposes related to Creative Ireland; the destination of these visits; the duration of these visits; the identity of the personnel who travelled on each visit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13815/18]

659. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the cost of each individual foreign visit taken by Creative Ireland personnel and or staff in her Department for purposes related to Creative Ireland including but limited to the cost of travel, accommodation, per diem and so on; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13816/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 658 and 659 together.

There were a total of eight foreign trips taken by Creative Ireland Programme staff in 2017. Full details and costs (including flights and subsistence) are contained in the following table. All travel and subsistence costs incurred were in line with DPER regulations in place at the time of travel.

Dates	Destination	Personnel	Purpose	Costs (rounded)
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11-16 Jan 2017	New York	Director Creative Ireland	Launch of the Creative Ireland Programme in the USA	€687
7 - 8 Feb 2017	London	Director Creative Ireland	Meeting with Irish Embassy in London in respect of launch of the Creative Ireland Programme in the UK	€258
27 - 28 Feb 2017	London	Director Creative Ireland	Launch of the Creative Ireland Programme in the UK	€979
27-28 Feb 2017	London	Principal Officer Creative Ireland	Launch of the Creative Ireland Programme in the UK	€391
14- 17 March 2017	Washington and New York	Director Creative Ireland	Launch of Ireland.ie website	€3,118
30-31 March 2017	London	Director Creative Ireland	Meeting with Embassy and UK Ireland Event	€1,019
21- 24 May 2017	Paris & Brussels	Director Creative Ireland	Attending the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council Meeting in Brussels with Minister and launch of the Creative Ireland Programme in Paris at the Centre Culturel Irlandais	€1,552
9 - 10 Sept 2017	Cambridge	Director Creative Ireland	Presentation on the Creative Ireland Programme at the British-Irish Association Conference, University of Cambridge	€514
			Total	€8518

* Flight to Washington had to be rebooked due to incorrect departure time being notified.

Architectural Heritage

660. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the ongoing archaeological monitoring that has taken place during each of the past ten peat extraction seasons along the routes of two 3,000 year old ancient trackways discovered at Mayne, County Westmeath in 2006 (details supplied). [13869/18]

661. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht further to Parliamentary Question No. 426 of 7 March 2017, the result of her Department's examination of the designation for protection of the untouched areas of high bog at Mayne, County Westmeath (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [13885/18]

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 660 and 661 together.

In line with general practice for peat extraction, a rolling series of survey work, investigation and excavations have been carried out at Mayne Bog over a number of years. In 2006, with the co-operation of the landowners, my Department commissioned a full survey of the then known togher (constructed of planks) followed by the excavation of a single cutting across the togher. During the course of this excavation, a second togher (of brushwood construction) was identified slightly to the north of the plank togher and running parallel to it. This was also surveyed and recorded.

In 2013, the landowners commissioned an environmental impact statement in connection with a peat extraction licence application to the Environmental Protection Agency. As part of the assessment process, the peatlands were fully examined by a qualified archaeological consultant and, aside from the plank togher, no further finds or features of archaeological significance were identified at that time.

In 2014, at my Department's request, another inspection was commissioned by the landowners to assess the status of both toghers. During 2015, and also at the request of my Department, the landowners commissioned a series of excavations which were carried out at three separate locations on both toghers.

In 2016, with the permission of the landowners, my Department commissioned an Induced Polarisation Survey (an advanced geophysical technique) to examine an area of high bog to the east of the open industrial bog at Mayne. This methodology was previously used successfully at Edercloon, County Longford, to identify wooden structures outside the road corridor where other parts of the structures were under excavation by the National Roads Authority. Due to the heavily waterlogged nature of the high bog at Mayne, the geophysical survey was inconclusive in tracking the togher into the higher peatlands. During 2017, my Department commissioned a further survey using metal probes inserted through the peat, as developed and employed successfully in research at Céide Fields in North Mayo. The survey successfully identified that the togher continues to the east from the edge of the high bog for a minimum distance of 200 metres at depths from the surface varying from 1 to 2.4 metres.

All the information referred to will assist in the protection and preservation of these toghers. In that context, my Department is continuing to engage with all stakeholders, including the local authority and the landowners, to progress the preservation of the togher in the high bog.

I am satisfied that the measures being taken with regard to the protection of the toghers uncovered at Mayne represent the best approach to securing an optimal outcome. Unlike cases involving delivery of key infrastructure which are supported by the Codes of Practice agreed and in place between my Department and the various State utility providers, archeological dis-

coveries arising from private development have to be dealt with on a case by case basis. In such instances, the practice is to seek the co-operation of private landowners with the protection and recording of monuments in line, for example, with my Department's engagement with farmers under GLAS, the current agri-environmental scheme. Such engagement is undertaken in a collaborative and transparent manner and I am satisfied that it is proving to be the best mechanism for guaranteeing the preservation of these monuments into the future.

Ferry Services

662. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if her Department will conduct a review of the decision to remove the contract from a company (details supplied) that operates a ferry service to and from Tory Island; if her Department will consult with the community of Tory Island in order to ascertain their opinions on the type of service that should operate on the island; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [14103/18]

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Joe McHugh): The contract with Turasmara is a five year contract, which expires on 31 March 2018. In accordance with public procurement rules, the Department ran an open tender competition for the provision of a passenger and light cargo ferry service for Toraigh Island. Prior to seeking tenders, my Department consulted with the island co-operative in order to obtain the views of the island community regarding the service.

Two tenders were received and, following evaluation, the contract for this service was awarded to the company, Réalt na Maidne Teo, using the vessel, MV Queen of Aran. This contract will come into effect from 1 April 2018 and will run for a 5 year period.